

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER, 1925

Vol. LXXXV

NUMBER 4

The Prodigal Mother

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—THE STORY OF THE STRANGE
COMPLICATIONS, TRAGIC AND AMUSING, IN THE
FAMILY HISTORY OF THE MURROWS

By Alice Rix

Author of "Prim Hides Things," "The Snob Splendid," etc.

THE law—you never could tell which way that cat would jump! Alison flung it at him that he had no proofs, that he would look a fool in the witness box.

Sylvester Murrow, his elbows on his desk, his head between his fists, stared before him, seeing a crowded court room and the harassed face of a man giving evidence under cross-examination.

"Where were you when you witnessed the scene you have described between your wife and the correspondent in this case? Behind the curtains, in your wife's drawing-room?" (Laughter.) "You have had considerable practice in taking observations under similar difficulties, I believe—is that a fact?" (Laughter.) "Very well. Now, sir, I put it to you that with no cause to suspect your wife of misconduct, you have made it your habit to spy—"

Murrow took out his handkerchief and wiped the sweat from his face. He had been thinking of showing Alison up in the divorce court, getting the boy, and pushing that sweep Hayden out, with his career gone phut; but if he would have to stew himself in the same pot, and perhaps get dished—

He got up angrily from his chair, and broke into a nervous trot around his library. Why in hell hadn't he made sure before showing his hand? Why hadn't he given those two all the rope they wanted, instead of breaking in when he saw what was going to happen? If he could have brought off this divorce, and got back at them both where it would hurt most—taken the boy from Alison—

Murrow stopped, to look with fierce dissatisfaction at a framed photograph of his wife and child that stood on his desk. As

he stood looking fixedly at it, his face changed—lost its baffled, exasperated expression, and suddenly became alert and cunning.

He studied the photograph a moment longer; then he looked at his watch, crossed the room with a quick, purposeful step, and pressed a button in the wall. To the manservant who answered the bell he gave rapid, precise instructions, dismissed him, and, taking some papers and notes from his desk, locked it and went hurriedly from the room.

In her own room, Alison Murrow fought for the ironical spirit with which she had met her husband's threat to divorce her. She was a girl of eighteen. Two years before, she had run away from school to marry Sylvester Murrow, fascinated by his rather somber good looks, by a secret and passionate courtship, and by the thrills of romantic adventure.

He had taken her to Mentone, and in the earliest days of her honeymoon she had discovered that she was married to a jealous maniac. Terrified and revolted, she would have run away from him then, but her father's sudden death left her without means or family of her own. Presently she was being rushed from place to place on the Continent, incessantly watched and insanely suspected, and escape was entirely impossible.

She had plenty of spirit and character, and after her first childish terrors at Mentone she lost all fear of her husband. She also lost all illusions, all faith in humanity, and all emotional feeling, except an extravagant love for her baby, born a year after her marriage.

A month later, Murrow's interests called him to England. He was a rich man of assured social position, and, as soon as they were settled in London, cards and invitations poured in. To his fury, his wife received his friends, returned visits, accepted invitations, sent out her own, and ran up bills, without consulting him, and coolly defied him to restrain her.

"We're in England. If you treat me here as you did abroad, I'll disgrace you. If you don't dress me properly, I'll go out in rags. If I had any money, and could take care of my baby, do you think I would live with you? As I've got to, I'll get all I can out of life!"

And young Mrs. Sylvester Murrow, exquisitely lovely, with a touch of mystery

about her youthful loveliness which was fascinating to men, did get a good deal out of life. There was no gossip. Her husband was seen everywhere with her, and was seen to be amusingly jealous; but, while she invited admiration and inspired a few deep passions, she avoided entanglements. Apparently she lived only to enjoy herself—one of the gayest, vainest, and most admired women in London, immaculate as Caesar's wife.

Murrow found he had created a situation which he could not control. His wife was utterly reckless. He could not interfere with her in public without scandal, and, in private, he could neither influence nor intimidate her.

"Why shouldn't I amuse myself? You made me pay the wages of sin when you kept me locked up in a room, with the blinds down. You can't do anything now but kill me. I shan't mind if I could take the baby with me. I shan't mind anything you do!"

Nevertheless, she did mind very much when her husband coarsely attacked her before Captain Robert Hayden. She was angered and humiliated by Hayden's offer—made as soon as he had thrown Murrow out of the room—to take her away and let her husband divorce her.

"Do you share my husband's opinions, Captain Hayden?" she asked bitterly.

"For God's sake, Alison! I want to marry you."

"I am married."

"But you can't go on living with a madman! Don't you realize that your husband's gone mad?"

"I realized that my husband *was* mad, as soon as I was married to him. I have always been glad that no one else realized it. Good-by, Captain Hayden. Please don't come again." Mrs. Murrow opened a French window in her drawing-room. "Would you like to go out through the garden? We often use that entrance to the square."

Hayden, furiously mortified, went out by the window. A moment later Murrow burst into the room. He laughed when he saw the open window, and threw a riding crop on the table.

"Gun shy, eh? Well, I'm not fool enough to swing for either of you! I'll thrash that swine wherever I meet him, and, now that I've got *you*, I'm going for a divorce *and the boy!*"

"You have no evidence for—"

"I've got the evidence of my own senses—that's good enough!"

"Are you really going to rant in court, as you did here, that there was a wanton invitation in my behavior when I sat on a couch with Captain Hayden in the drawing-room, in broad daylight? Will you admit that you jumped out of a closet when you saw him look at me 'the way a man looks at *his woman*,' to prevent us from falling into each other's arms? You disgraced me before one of my friends, but you neither saw nor heard anything improper between us. If you're going to make a spectacle of yourself in the divorce court, with this evidence of your own senses, I shall *like* to hear you giving it, and *telling how you got it!*"

"How would you like me to disgrace you before a few more of your friends?" Murrow screamed after her, as she left the room. "You watch out for it, after this!"

Young Mrs. Murrow was not afraid that her husband would take his grotesque evidence into the courts, but she weakened before this threat to disgrace her before her friends. She loved her place in the world. Murrow's regard for his own position had made it secure. To-day he seemed to have lost it, together with all regard for decency. He had made accusations before Hayden, though he had never made them to her alone. She would not feel safe in public with him now. She would not dare to receive her friends in her own house.

She thought of her thirteen months abroad, shut up alone with him—a monotony of horror. If this was to be her life—she threw herself across her bed and sobbed desperately.

"Madame est donc souffrante?"

The woman had come into the room like a cat. Murrow surrounded his wife with "trained" servants, and the maid maliciously enjoyed her duties.

"Make my bath very hot," Alison replied, without moving from the bed.

While she bathed, she determined to behave as if nothing unusual had happened, and to win her husband out of this new phase of his mania. She put herself into the maid's hands, and asked for an elaborate frock. Her beauty always made its appeal. She had never used it consciously, but to-night she was afraid of his mood, and she wanted to keep her place in the

world. The bargain degraded her—life degraded her, she thought bitterly, as she went down to dinner.

She found the table laid for one. In the two years of their marriage Murrow had never dined away from home without her. The butler—another trained servant—looked at her impertinently as he pulled out the solitary chair.

Seized by a premonition, she fled from the room and ran to the nursery. It was in darkness. The light that she switched on with trembling fingers showed it empty and in disorder.

Her frantic ringing of the nurse's bell brought a frightened young maidservant to the door.

"I rang for nurse," said Alison.

"Y-yes, madam. Nurse's gone, madam." Alison looked at her with terrible eyes, and the girl burst into tears.

"Hush—unless you can tell me something!" said her mistress.

The girl, struggling with her sobs, told what she knew.

"It's abroad. Nurse whispered to me, quick, as they was going, that you was to be told. She said she didn't know where, but she'd write, and they're not coming back. The master asked her would she go abroad to stop, and she said she'd go anywhere with the baby. She tried her hardest to get to tell you, but the master wouldn't have it. She was frightened he'd leave her, and she thought you'd want her with the baby—and him crying for you something awful!"

"Yes—never mind!"

Alison moved about the room, mechanically putting it to rights. She stood for a long time at the window, looking out. The maid watched her pityingly, making little snuffling noises as the tears dripped down her cheeks. Alison's eyes were dry, but still terrible, when she turned from the window and saw the girl standing in the doorway.

"Come to my room, and help me to pack."

Hayden found Mrs. Murrow waiting for him in his chambers, when he came in late from his club. He took her on her own terms.

"I don't love you," she said. "I don't even like you very much. I came to you because I wouldn't have to explain. You saw, to-day, and you told me that you wanted me—"

"Oh, my dear!"

"Well, be good to me!"

II

HAYDEN was good to her. He was rich, and could afford to give up the political career out of which Murrow had vengefully desired to push him. He made Alison his career. When Murrow refused to divorce her, he took her to the East, and all over the world; and nine years later, when Murrow died, he married her. Then he brought her back to England, opened his houses, and invited the world to visit his wife, as if he was conferring a privilege on the world.

The world was good to her, too. Her story was known, and the sin of circumstance was forgiven. Alison Hayden slipped into Alison Murrow's brilliant position, and had all things—except one—that Alison Murrow had. She never troubled her husband with her longing for her son. Hayden's sole reason for existence was to give her everything she longed for, but he could not give her that.

A month before he died, Murrow had told young Sylvester the truth about his mother. After a long and wandering story, he summarized:

"Your mother deserted us both, when you were a year old, and has lived in sin for nine years. That is why there is no portrait of her in our home."

Sylvester, aged ten, had vague ideas of sin, but he grasped one essential of his mother's history. He had believed her dead. He made a single comment:

"So my mother left me when I was only a baby!"

Murrow died happier for the bitterness in the young voice.

Alison wrote to Sylvester after her marriage to Hayden, but the boy burned the letter, unanswered. Nevertheless, she wrote again when he was twenty-one, and had just taken holy orders and a wife. She wrote that she wished her son every happiness in his marriage. Would he care to see her? If not, would he write to her sometimes? A letter addressed in care of Barings, London, would always find her. At the end of her letter she mentioned that she was now a widow.

The Rev. Sylvester had married a nice, churchy, titled, country-bred girl, with an open-air mind and a gentle heart. When he asked her to marry him, he thought it

his painful duty to tell her his mother's story. She read Alison's letter over his shoulder.

"Will you see her, Syl?"

"No."

"But you'll write?"

"Why should I?"

"Because we're so happy."

Sylvester kissed his bride.

"Our happiness doesn't concern her, darling."

"But we have so much! I'd like to give a little away. *Please, Syl!*"

"Marjorie, you're asking me something that—"

"It's the very first thing I've asked you."

"But, my darling—come back, Marjie! Why, Marjie, you're not crying?"

Honeymoon tears are soon dried with kisses and capitulations. Sylvester wrote to his mother, when his wife was not looking over his shoulder:

The Rev. Sylvester Murrow is in receipt of Mrs. Robert Heath Hayden's communication, and further correspondence would be distasteful to him.

This letter Alison tore into very small pieces. After that she never thought of her son, except as a year-old baby.

When Hayden died, Alison did not seem to be deeply affected. She wore her weeds for a year, but went about in them discreetly, and received two offers of marriage before she took them off. Then she went abroad, and traveled like a royal personage. Hayden had left her every penny of his money.

She was at Cairo, a year later—twenty-one years after she left Sylvester Murrow—and, at a quick glance, she looked not much older than the girl Hayden had found waiting for him in his London chambers. It was not the belated youth of the well preserved woman. Youth was there in its defiant freshness, which the beauty expert cannot detain or recover. The years had passed her without stopping.

She sat on the veranda of Shepherd's, buying Egyptian beads from an Arab boy, in the X-ray light of the African morning. She wore a white dress and no hat. Her dark hair was shingled, and brushed straight off her face. Its unbroken contour and her slender silhouette were only a year or two late for girlhood.

The Arab boy's eyes traveled impudently over the infidel woman's beauty, as she

examined his beads. He took her for twenty, and thought her well preserved at what is, according to oriental standards, an advanced age for a woman.

A tall, noticeable Englishman came along the veranda, with a newspaper in his hand, and stopped to take in these particulars. Then he kicked the Arab boy out of the way, removed his hat, and sat down by Mrs. Hayden.

"You must have run all the way from Paris," she said coolly.

"I wanted to get here first with glad tidings," he smiled, and stretched out a handsome, well shod foot. "'How beautiful on the mountains,'" he quoted, and turned the smile on Mrs. Hayden.

"Is it new news?" she asked.

"Been out about six weeks, in England."

"Why didn't it arrive here the same minute, by wireless?"

"Well," he said, laughing, "they haven't got as far as that with the atom."

He laid a copy of *Vogue* on the table, and opened it at a full-page Madonna group—"Lady Marjorie Murrow and Her Infant Son, Sylvester."

The pulse throbbed in Alison's throat, but she smiled at him ironically, and bent over the paper. Lord George Hungerstone's eyes, like the Arab boy's, traveled over her beauty, and not impudently, although he was the most impudent man alive.

"What do you mean by it, granny?" he inquired.

"I wanted to try a new cure for you," she smiled, without raising her eyes.

"Don't go on having grandchildren with that idea in your darlin' head! Man's not warned against another man's grandmother, you know."

"You seem bursting with Biblical information this morning. Have you been doing some serious reading as you came across?"

"It took all my time to work out what relation infant Sylvester will be to our grandchildren. I'll bet you never do it!"

"I'll bet I never do."

Mrs. Hayden called the Arab boy back, and paid for her beads. *Vogue*, with the Madonna group, slipped from the table to her feet. Hungerstone smiled quizzically as he picked it up; but she made no movement to take it, so he folded it and put it into his pocket.

"You can dine with me to-night, if you

like, Hungerstone. I'm leaving in the morning. I've got a charming American woman coming to dinner."

"Thank you! I needn't unpack, then, as we're leaving in the morning. Where do we go from here?"

"Half past eight, dinner," replied Mrs. Hayden, as she got up, laughing, and walked away.

Hungerstone watched her graceful escape, and smiled cheerfully to himself. "Dogged does it" was the device he bore through snow and ice, as he marched over the map of the world, proposing to Alison Hayden. She left him behind everywhere, and usually had to leave him behind again at the next place. He made the chase inconspicuous and inoffensive—observed all the conventions, stopped at another hotel, paid her no marked attentions, lost himself in the crowd—but he was there. He proposed amusingly, and carried defeat with a gallant impudence that amused her without embarrassment.

Besides, nobody took anything that George Hungerstone did seriously—though a number of unattached women of his world would have been glad to do so. He was the most frivolous man in London. His was a distinguished name, with a rent roll attached that easily kept up one of the great estates of England, in these days when everybody is selling; but Hungerstone was in the late forties, and had never weakened. He was devoted to all women, and all women, except Mrs. Hayden, petted and led him about, amusing, companionable, ornamental, fashionable—like a well-mannered and pedigreed dog. A few men regarded him differently, but only these few men had got him from another viewpoint.

When he had seen the last of Mrs. Hayden, he sat down and jumped his mind back over twenty-three years, to the time when he had first seen her.

"You've got a shy bride to take in, George," said a cousin of his, who was giving a dinner at Mentone, "so for goodness' sake disinfect your dinner talk!"

Hungerstone pulled hard, all through dinner, to get a reply from an extremely young girl, who had no dinner talk.

"Story here!" he thought, curiously watching her eyes, which flitted, swift and furtive as bats, between his and watching eyes across the table.

He left Mentone in the morning, and

did not see the Murrows again until he met them, in the season, in his own set, in London. The shy bride took his breath away. She was a brilliantly poised woman—the loveliest, he thought, he had ever seen—and she talked like a brook. The watching eyes of Mentone were near, but there were no batlike flittings, thitherward and back to his, from the cool, mysterious eyes into which he looked longer than was good for him. There was something vaguely familiar about the husband, but Hungerstone was not interested to place it.

The next day he heard all about "the amusing Murrow business" at his club.

"You remember him, George—old Secret Service Murrow—your last term—rooms on the stairs at Maudlin. Two of 'em, brothers. The other one—nice chap!—went out in Mesopotamia. Always the wrong man gets killed, what? Yes, old Secret Service is always on the job now. Doesn't bother her much—goes in for having a good time, and lets him sweat. Pretty girl!"

Hungerstone looked thoughtful, and the other man laughed:

"Don't throw money away, George!"

Hungerstone threw money away. He would have thrown his life away. He hadn't a chance with young Mrs. Murrow—nobody had. When the scandal came, he cursed Hayden. Quicker than most, and very chivalrously in love, he had his own opinion of "the amusing Murrow business," and its amazing sequel.

"Stuck it smiling—fed up—gone off with anybody, probably—any decent man would have steered the girl straight!"

Hungerstone made no attempt to see Mrs. Murrow, although they were often in the same places abroad, until she returned to London as Mrs. Hayden. His was the first of the two offers of marriage that she received, and declined, in her weeds. How many times he had offered himself since, neither of them could have said. If he felt sentimental, he could look them up in Baedeker.

He took *Vogue* from his pocket, and studied the page that had not appeared to interest Mrs. Hayden.

"Infant Sylvester—not much in him. Lady Marjorie—nice little thing—nice eyes—about nineteen or twenty. Alison wasn't as old as that at Mentone. Might have been seventeen. Seventeen and twenty-three, forty—somewhere around forty.

Wouldn't think it, looking at her, just now—this light out here, and looking down. Funny thing—get a woman looking down, no eyes—good as a birth certificate. Looked about twenty-two or twenty-three. Feel the same if she looked eighty, and had eighty grandchildren!"

III

WHILE the African sun burned to its swift setting at Cairo, an English November fog crawled around the windows of a Somersetshire rectory, and Lady Marjorie Murrow nursed infant Sylvester beside the fire. The living Madonna group made a touching picture of youth and innocence in the firelight, but the Rev. Sylvester looked on his work with disfavor. His young wife's absorption in motherhood excluded him. He loved his wife and child passionately—would have laid down his life for them—but behind this virtue and many others crouched his father's vice.

"Put that young loafer down, Marjorie. Asleep, isn't he?"

"I love to hold him when he's asleep. Come and look at him, Syl!"

"Three's a crowd," Sylvester said ungraciously, but he went over, sat on the arm of the chair, and put his arm around them. "What have you been thinking about, with your eyes in the next county?"

"Your mother."

Marjorie felt him stiffen, but there was something she wanted to say, and, like most gentle women, she was tenacious. The coming of the baby had been like a seed dropped in her open-air mind, where sweet things sprang up quickly. She thought of Alison, without her baby. She wanted, if Syl would let her, to share her baby with his mother.

"I can't think *your* mother could be a really bad woman, Syl. Were she and your father happy together, like us, before—"

"How do I know, Marjorie? I was only a year old when she went away."

"That was the awful part—leaving her little boy." Marjorie hugged her baby. "I suppose she cried over you terribly that night, if you could remember."

"I was not there. My father had taken me away."

"Syl! You don't mean *first*?"

His wife turned around in the chair to look at him.

"My father was justified by his suspicions," replied Sylvester stiffly.

"*Suspicious!* Didn't he *know*, before he did that dreadful thing to her? Suppose he was mistaken?"

"My dear Marjorie, she went to the man."

"Well, Syl, if you took baby away from me, just because you *suspected* that I'd done wrong, and I hadn't, I wouldn't care, then, what I did."

"You mean you think *anything* excuses a wife's infidelity to her husband?" Sylvester asked sternly.

"No, I don't; but I think taking her child from her, if she hadn't done wrong, might explain it."

"Then you think the child comes first with a woman, before her husband, do you?"

"Oh, Syl, that's a terrible question to answer! I don't think a woman would reason that way, when she was suffering—"

"There's no evidence that my mother was suffering. She left my father for a richer man. My father said she must have made all her preparations to go that night, for she was out of the house an hour after we left it. I should say that she found our absence a convenience."

Sylvester got up to light his pipe, and puffed comfortably.

"Syl, that sounds hard. You don't know that it's true."

"I know that my mother deserted me when I was only a baby, and lived in sin for nine years, without troubling herself about me. Why should I think of her sentimentally? And you know my view of adultery. I regard it as the unforgivable sin."

"Christ forgave."

"Are you teaching me my Christian duty?" Sylvester demanded furiously. "I advise you to read what St. Paul says on a wife's duty to her husband."

"He said something about charity, too, didn't he?"

The Rev. Sylvester turned his back on his family. He sat down again on the other side of the room, and read a book. That is to say, he held a book. He read his own mind.

It was normally a clear and rather a cautious mind, but its line of reasoning took sudden, violent excursions. Struck by a new significance in a phrase, in one of his own sermons, he would rant extemporaneously in his pulpit, like the prophet Ezekiel, wandering far from his text. He was

away now on a grotesque theory suggested by Marjorie's defense of his mother.

He had been deceived in the woman he had married! These thoughts of hers revealed dark and unsuspected depths in a mind which he had believed to be an open, spotless page. She was in sympathy with the adulteress. She excused, or "explained"—where was the difference?—his abandoned mother, and even saw herself doing as his mother had done. *His wife leaving him for another man!*

Marjorie saw the book trembling in his hands, and went over to him with the sleeping baby.

"Kiss us, daddy! We're sorry."

Sylvester kissed them. He prided himself on being a just man. He judged sinners harshly, but never, if he could help it, hastily. He might be mistaken. He would pray for light to know his wife, and would watch to see that her thoughts did not stray sinfully.

A very little leaven of heredity leavens the whole. A year's tender experience could not outweigh this sudden suspicion. From that night, Sylvester watched and prayed—especially watched. He was young Secret Service Murrow on his father's job.

The Rev. Sylvester Murrow's parish was large, but not lively, nor abounding in gay seducers. Young men got away from it early. Its summer dissipations were croquet and tennis, and a few wild hearts fished the Avon. Winters had their stiff teas and dinner parties, and there were mothers' meetings and the Dorcas Society the year round. Through none of these avenues did Marjorie seem likely to wander into the downward path of Sylvester's mother.

As it worried Syl to speak of his mother, she did not speak of her, or think of her, except to pray. Marjorie was not deep or clever. Her thoughts, like bright pebbles at the bottom of clear, shallow pools, could be seen in the "nice eyes" that Hungerstone had approved in *Vogue*; but who knows what jealousy finds to feed on? Sylvester's fantastic beast thrived finely, but he kenneled it in his sick brain for a whole year before it broke loose to devour.

Lady Marjorie, daughter of an M. F. H., and pet of a sporting county, had given up hunting and hunt balls, and all dancing, when she married a clergyman. Her home was not far away—an hour's run by car—and her father, well mounted, made noth-

ing of miles. He rode over to ask Marjorie to come to this year's hunt ball, to please him.

Sylvester was not at home when his father-in-law called.

"I don't s'pose his reverence will let you dance, Marjie, even with your old dad." He slapped his crop against his boot, and smiled wistfully on his only daughter.

"I wouldn't care to dance, dad—though Syl would let me, in a minute, if I wanted to; but we'll love to go to look on."

When he heard of it, however, the Rev. Sylvester said he would not love it at all.

"I'm not a sporting parson, and you know very well I don't approve of modern dancing. I regard it as nothing short of indecent. I've said so a dozen times in the pulpit, and I'm not going to give it tacit approval. Marjie, you will have to excuse yourself."

"I'm sorry, Syl, but I can't disappoint dad, now I've promised." Marjorie's lips were set in their line of gentle obstinacy. "Would you rather I went alone, with them? Dad would send his car, and one of the boys could bring me home and go back in it."

Sylvester saw the pit yawning at his feet. With a face as black as thunder, he went with his wife to look on at the hunt ball.

IV

THE familiar ballroom, where she had danced many happy hours away, the familiar pink, the familiar faces, the welcome she got, her father's proud delight in her—all these went to Marjorie's young head a little. Her husband had never seen her so excited, or so careless of him.

Old partners crowded around her. When she said she would not dance, they made a game of coming up to tease her for every one.

"You remember, Marjie," and "When we two," and "That time when you and I"—such phrases buzzed in Sylvester's ears like poisonous insects. Glances, smiles, familiar taps, inflamed his eyes. Marjorie sat decorously beside him, among the elders, but he could see her eyes hungrily following the "indecent" dancing, and her feet danced under her chair. He saw a sight that blinded him when she jumped up, laughing, with her hands out to an old partner who came up to tease her for the last dance.

"I believe I will, this last one, Syl! Hold my fan!"

Sylvester dropped the fan and seized her arm, whispering fiercely:

"You're not in a condition to dance!"

It was absurd, and Marjorie colored with indignation.

"As if I'd have come at all, if—"

"Come on, Marjie! We're losing half this!"

Sylvester saw his wife whirled away from him, hell bound.

The dance was a fox trot, and Marjorie had not danced for two years. It was encoored, and she danced the encore, and finished breathless, from want of practice, and a little dizzy. She clung to her partner, who steadied her with his arm still around her waist, when the music had stopped.

The light for which Sylvester had prayed was beating fiercely on his brain. In this commonplace ballroom he saw his wife a wanton, flushed, excited, laughing, shameless, in another man's embrace.

He was waiting for Marjorie, with her wraps, when she came back to him. He hustled her through her farewells and into the car. His demon had him in a strangle hold; but, to do Sylvester justice, he was wrestling hard and praying not to be put down. His wife was young and as yet uncorrupted. She was his earthly treasure, and a soul to save. He meant not to speak until he could speak calmly. He sat stiffly, at a distance from her, in the car.

Marjorie, humming the fatal dance tune, moved close to him and put her head contentedly on his shoulder. The contact crazed him.

"I don't want you straight from another man's arms."

"Syl, that's horrible!"

Sylvester could be horrible, almost as horrible as his father, and Marjorie was not another Alison. She lay in the corner of the car, with her face pressed into the padded wall, listening to strange things strangely put, until they became a confused roaring in her ears, and rolled away like thunder into distance and silence.

When the car stopped before the rectory, Sylvester, sane enough now in all conscience, and frantic with self-reproach, had to lift his wife out of it and carry her into the house. Calling hysterically for help, he laid her on a couch. When they had brought her, at last, out of what had

seemed so terribly like death, and he saw that she could understand him, he sent the servants away and went on his knees to her.

"Marjie, my sweet! My own dear little wife! Don't remember—forget everything I said! I didn't say those things to you—it wasn't myself. I couldn't—something gets hold of me—I don't know—I can't help—I'll tell you, Marjie! I've never told you, I didn't want you to know—I'm jealous, darling. I can't bear—Marjie darling, you understand—it's only because I love you so terribly!"

Marjorie turned her face away.

"Terribly! Terribly! I don't want to be loved *terribly*. No, I don't understand. I don't want to—I don't—"

"Marjie! Don't do that—don't turn away from me! I love you every way—I—you *must* understand! Look at me, darling! Open your eyes, and look at me, and listen. A man's love is different from a woman's. Marjie, won't you look at me? I'm trying to tell you—Marjie! Marjie! Oh, God!"

When Sylvester, rather consciously adorning his surplice and Oxford hood, prayed from his pulpit, before his respectful parishioners, he prayed in sounding phrases, in a rich, deep voice, and with a confidence in his personal influence over his Maker that was as naïve as David's. Disheveled and distraught, on the stairs outside his wife's door, he prayed, and prayed again, monotonously, a two-word prayer—a thin, broken, despairing cry for mercy:

"Oh, God! Oh, God!"

Doctors, nurses, a great surgeon, passed him on the stairs, going in and out through his wife's door. It was Marjorie's mother who had to see them, and listen to them, and carry out instructions. Sylvester was praying on the stairs. The day they were all at the rectory—Marjorie's father and mother and brothers—her mother sat down on the stairs beside Sylvester.

"Father and I have been trying to comfort each other, Syl, saying how happy she's always been. Life brings everybody sorrows and disappointments, but Marjie has never had one. She's been our dear, happy girl and your happy wife. If she has to go now, so young, we're going to try to think of her going to sleep early after a happy day."

"Oh, God!"

Of course, he deserved to lose her; but she came back to him, to forgive him, and to be canonized.

"Marjie, my saint! I don't deserve it, darling. I don't deserve your forgiveness, or God's. I want to do something to deserve it. I will, Marjie! I want it to be something that will cost me a great deal. You know, darling—a great sacrifice."

Marjorie looked at him wistfully.

"I'd like to ask you to do something like that for me, Syl—if I thought you could."

"I could do anything on God's earth for you, my sweet!"

"Oh, Syl! Then forgive your mother."

It's hard on a man, when he has offered to make a great sacrifice, to be asked to do something he doesn't want to do. Sylvester looked reproachfully at his saint. Her face was pinched with suffering, her poor body was shrunken, her eyes pleaded. He kissed her tenderly, and sat down to write to his mother.

"This is an awful letter to write, Marjie. I can't start off 'Dear mother, I forgive you.' How can I begin?"

"I know—I've been thinking. Why not ask your mother to come to us for a month at Christmas? Don't say anything about forgiving, but sign it 'Your son, Sylvester'—that will mean that you've forgiven her."

Sylvester never felt less like forgiving his mother. He wrote briefly and sulkily, inviting her to come to them for a month at Christmas, and read the letter to his wife before he signed it "Yours truly, Sylvester Murrow."

Marjorie held out her arms to him, when the letter was sent off.

"You'll always be glad you wrote, Syl, if anything should happen to her before you could see her. Your mother must be getting quite old now, isn't she?"

"I don't know her age, Marjie—my father didn't say how old she was. He never spoke of her, except that once. We moved into the country, and had all new servants, and I've never known any one who knew her. I can't say at all—about your mother's age, I suppose."

"Mother's over sixty." Marjorie looked thoughtfully into the fire. "It must be sad for old people who haven't anybody belonging to them, to love them. Perhaps she'll like to live with us, Syl, when she sees baby."

"God forbid!" prayed Sylvester, in the Psalmist's most self-confident and authoritative manner.

V

MRS. HAYDEN was passing this season of her lonely old age on the Riviera. Lord George Hungerstone was there, contented as a clam. He had had a month to get his breath, between her escapes, and he was wasting it at brief, irregular intervals.

"If I knew when to expect you!" protested Mrs. Hayden, after having been urged to become Lady George Hungerstone twice within an afternoon. "Say once a week, like the laundry!"

"Well, name the day, Alison—catch my humor?"

"I couldn't miss it. There's Nancy, with letters." Mrs. Hayden jumped up, as a girl came into the Casino, reading a letter. "I'm going for mine—"

"Finish your tea—I'll bring them over to you."

Hungerstone went away and returned with a handful of letters.

"I got my own," he said, sorting them, and laid hers by her plate.

She picked one up carelessly, and looked at the address.

Mrs. Hayden's faint, ironic smile was as much a feature of her face as her mouth. Hungerstone, who had never seen her without it, except when he saw her Murrow's furtive-eyed young wife, at Mentone, had often wondered what her face would be like without it. He saw now that it was like the face of another woman, and its extreme whiteness startled him.

She had not opened her letter. She sat looking at the address. Suddenly she sprang up distractedly, and ran out of the Casino.

Hungerstone, alarmed and distressed for her, saw that he would serve her least by following her. He would be bombarded with questions on his way to the door. People—strangers and people who knew her—staring after her, were already turning to stare at him. The girl Nancy got up quickly from her table. He sat down, and began cutting open his letters.

"Hello!" he said, jumping up and sitting down again, as Nancy dropped into Mrs. Hayden's chair.

"Alison had bad news?" she inquired, glancing curiously at the pile of unopened letters by Mrs. Hayden's plate.

Hungerstone leaned confidentially across the table.

"Alison hasn't been plunging lately, has she, Nancy?"

"I don't know—how should I? Alison never tells me anything. Why?"

"Well, I don't know—just an idea—a firm name on a letter. Looked worried, and said she'd got to cable an answer."

"Oh, well, she can afford it."

The girl, looking disappointed, pushed back her chair.

"Here, don't you run away from me, too!" Hungerstone beckoned to a waiter.

"What is it this time, Nancy?"

It was a grenadine and two cigarettes. After Nancy had had them, and gone away, Hungerstone waited for an hour to see if Mrs. Hayden would send for her letters. Then he put them in his pocket, and went to his hotel to change, and on to hers, where he was engaged to dine with her.

Mrs. Hayden did not answer a telephone call to her room, did not appear, and did not send any excuse. Hungerstone dined alone at her hotel, thankful that none of the Casino crowd was about, to question him. He could not answer the questions, in his own mind.

He thought he knew everything in Alison's life—it had no dark corners. She was rich and unattached. To all appearances, she had outlived her sorrows and was care-free; yet she had shown real fear at the mere address on a letter, and, without opening it, had made a dramatic and conspicuous exit from the Casino.

"She doesn't want my help," he thought, with a twinge. "All I could do was to put up a rabbit for our bright young hound, Nancy. I'll bet she's been hanging by the nose to some telephone to-night, getting through with the news that Alison's lost all her money."

He lounged about the hotel until after midnight, and, when he went away he left a brief note for Mrs. Hayden at the desk:

Have your letters.—H.

Alison had not run far from the Casino when she stopped running. She had been startled to see Sylvester's handwriting on the letter that she picked up haphazard from among the others. She had seen it only once before, when "the Rev. Sylvester Murrow" acknowledged "Mrs. Robert Heath Hayden's communication." Her son had written, then, that he wished for

no further correspondence between them, but now it appeared that he was writing to her himself, uninvited.

She could think of no reason why. They had not even common property interests. Their lives were as far apart as the poles. He had coldly put her out of his, and she believed that he would never want to see her.

At this point she was seized with panic. If her son was very ill—dying—he might want to see his mother. Her mind was thrust back twenty years. She saw a year-old baby tossing feverishly in his crib, wanting his mother—and she ran.

After a minute or two, however, she hurried more soberly. Her son was a man, with a man's purpose, in writing to her, and the handwriting on the envelope was not that of a dying or a very sick man. Burning to know why he had written, she tore open the letter in the hotel corridor, outside her rooms.

She felt an overwhelming emotion while reading it, but when she had finished she felt nothing. She went into her room, put the letter away in her desk, and rang for her maid. When she was undressed, she dismissed the woman for the night and stretched herself on a couch.

She lay there for two hours. When her telephone rang, she got up, and, forgetting her engagement with Hungerstone, she took the receiver from the hook, left it off, and went back to the couch.

She was not conscious of thinking anything except, incuriously, how strange it was that Sylvester's letter had moved her only for a moment. In her tragic life she had known dreadful sensations—terror, disgust, revolt from physical bondage, degradation, and despair, but only one sorrow. She had known amusement, pleasure, and excitement, but only one joy. This joy had been violently taken from her. Now it was suddenly restored, long after she had given up hope of it; but she was not joyful. She was not even thankful. She did not know whether she cared to answer this letter from her son.

She did not move from the couch, where she slept fitfully until she got up in the morning, to unlock her door for her maid.

"*Mais, mon Dieu! Madame est donc souffrante?*"

The girl's French eyes were affectionately concerned, but Alison bitterly recalled the words. How she had fought, that night

—and always—to mask her emotions. Her pride and vanity had been her crutches to carry her before every one—even Captain Hayden. She had wept all her tears for herself and for her baby that first night, in his arms. She had not wept since.

A woman moved is like a fountain troubled,
Muddy, ill seeming, thick, bereft of beauty.

Alison loved her beauty. It was her own, all she had. No one could take it from her, or could restore it if she lost it. Her maid's shocked surprise told her that it had suffered from the ravages of the night, although she had not shed a tear; and she felt deep resentment. She replied as coldly, and in much the same words, as to the other woman, twenty years ago. She ordered her bath and massage, and gave the whole morning to repairs.

When she was dressed, she told the maid to run the blinds up to the top of the windows. Then she stood before the long glass between them, and, in the trying brilliance of the Riviera sunshine, studied herself from head to foot.

She was forty, or would be forty in a month; but she looked twenty-three or twenty-four—and no one criticized her looks so unsparingly as herself. She smiled into the glass, and into the maid's expressive eyes, brightly admiring her. She wondered, if Sylvester saw her, whether he would be proud of his young mother—and suddenly she wanted him to see her.

She cabled her reply to his letter:

Thank you both—expect me afternoon 15th—
please don't meet me.

ALISON HAYDEN.

When she had committed herself to this meeting, she felt utterly lonely. Even a painful habit, if abruptly discontinued, leaves a sense of loss. For more than twenty years there had been the ache in her heart that she would never know her son. Now her heart was empty. She was glad to see Hungerstone in the lounge, reading an English newspaper.

"Who do you think is dead?" he greeted her cheerfully.

"I don't care."

He gave her her letters, and she thanked him, and began reading them. Hungerstone was a comfortable creature, she thought gratefully. He had not even looked curious. They might have parted at the Casino, quite as usual.

"I'm going away to-day," she told him, when she had finished with her letters. She made his pulse jump by telling him where: "London."

"Funny thing—so am I!"

VI

SOME of Marjorie's preparations to receive baby's grandmother at the rectory were ridiculously sentimental and genuinely touching. She put the baby's picture, and one of Sylvester at the same age, in a duplex morocco frame, stamped "My Darlings," on Alison's dressing table. She learned to play that ridiculously sentimental and touching composition, "Grossmütterchen." She knitted a white woolen shawl, as big as a bath sheet, to hang over the back of the easiest easy chair in the house—for it was bitter Christmas weather in England "to come home to" from the Riviera.

Sylvester would have liked to suppress these intimate demonstrations, but Marjorie, still as white and fragile as a snowdrop, had her own way, these days, with her repentant husband.

"We must send the car to meet both afternoon trains, Syl," she said two or three times. "We can't let her come up from the station in a cab."

"Of course not, darling," he answered patiently.

But the Murrows' car did not meet either of the afternoon trains on the 15th of December. The first was due to arrive at the station at 4.45. Half an hour earlier a magnificent Rolls-Royce slid up the rectory drive, and its musical horn was heard in the drawing-room.

"Oh, botheration—callers, Syl! We can't see *anybody*, even if it's the bishop. Quick! Waters is in the hall—tell him 'not at home'!"

"Not at home," repeated Sylvester, in the hall.

"Not at home," repeated the butler, at the front door.

"I think I am expected. Will you please say it is Mrs. Hayden?"

The clear voice carried consternation into the drawing-room.

"Don't keep her a second! Explain that we didn't want to see any one else! Tell her I'm bringing baby! She'll want you alone first!"

Marjorie fled, excitedly scattering orders. Sylvester looked at himself in the glass for

a moment, and went out to meet the prodigal mother.

Sylvester was not shy. He had preached his first sermon without a flutter of the pulse. He had rehearsed a pulpit manner, and it served. He had rehearsed a sort of pulpit manner for this first meeting with his mother—tactfully but rebukefully kind, putting the priest before the son, and the mother behind the penitent; but in an instant it was knocked into the middle of next week.

A very lovely woman waited in his hall. She was smothered in chinchillas, and Sylvester could see that she must be slimmer than Marjorie, to make such a slim bundle of all that fur. Her skirts were shorter than Marjorie probably wore at thirteen, and her quite delightful legs showed no disposition to bend at the knees. She stood up on them before the son whom she had deserted more than twenty years ago, looking about twenty, and waiting for his forgiveness, with a slightly imperious air of being accustomed to more consideration than was offered her at the Rev. Sylvester's door.

Waters, a country butler of no concealments, was staring down her throat. Sylvester, intensely annoyed with the man, became suddenly and hatefully conscious that he was doing the same thing. He rushed forward almost boisterously, and met his mother with a manner that he had not used since he left school.

"Oh, *please* come in! We had no idea it would be you—we thought you were some one else. We were not going to see you, if you were not—I should say, if you were!"

The words beat in his ears like drums. He thought he had never heard anything more idiotic, and felt his clerical collar getting red-hot.

"How do you do?" said Alison.

She gave him two fingers, and walked into her son's drawing-room. Sylvester followed, a little more coherent, but still fussily explaining:

"My wife ran up for the baby. We thought you would come by train, and were sending the car. Oh, your car! Our garage will take it, and we have room for your man."

"Thank you, but I've made arrangements for them in the town—if my maid won't be a bother. Is this your wife and child?"

Alison went over to the fireplace to look at a photograph on the mantelshelf. She could not endure to look at Sylvester. He was in the hated image of his father. She wished herself a thousand miles away.

"Let me take your furs, and please sit by the fire. You must have had a cold ride down."

Sylvester lifted the chinchillas from his mother's shoulders—lightly covered with gray georgette, which left her creamy throat bare—and pulled up the easiest easy chair to the fire. The knitted woolen shawl looked him innocently in the eye. He was excited, nervous, altogether out of himself, and to save his life he could not keep back a snort of laughter.

At the sound, Alison turned to look at him in astonishment.

"I—I beg your pardon! This—this shawl," he stammered. Hopelessly tangled up in it, he finished in desperate confusion: "It was for you. Marjie—we thought you'd be old. She knitted it for you."

He laughed again, foolishly.

"I'll put it on!" cried Alison, delighted with him. He did not look like his father when he laughed and blushed boyishly and his eyes admired his mother. "Put it on for me!"

She let him wrap her in the shawl, and turn her around before the glass to see herself in a knitted woolen shawl. They both thought her absurd in it.

Marjorie, stealing down the stairs with the baby on her arm, afraid of being too soon, and of intruding on this sacred meeting between mother and son, heard laughter in the drawing-room, and stopped, shocked, by the door. Sylvester, dashing out with his arm full of gorgeous furs, nearly knocked her down.

"S-sh! Marjorie, you'll get a shock! Go in—I'm coming in a minute. *Don't show anything!*"

Poor Marjorie tried not to show anything. She, too, had innocently prepared a manner. She thought she would not try to say anything—she would be sure to cry—but would go up to Syl's mother and kiss her, and put baby in her arms. She saw the girlish figure lying carelessly, with crossed legs—such a lot showing!—in the easy chair, the dark shingled head against her silly shawl, the lovely, coolly amused face. She would as soon have thought of going up to a strange man and kissing him in the street. Why, this woman did not

look as if she would know how to hold a baby!

She stood stiffly in the doorway.

"I'm Marjorie," she said. She went halfway across the room toward the easy chair, and stopped. "And this is Baby Sylvester," she added, holding the child up aggressively, to be looked at.

The figure in the easy chair did not move or speak. Baby Sylvester was a year old. He was in the image of his father at a year old. A bright head like his had lain on Alison's breast, and the loss of it had been an agony there for more than twenty years.

Something stirred, in the silence, between the two women, and Marjorie was seized with trembling. She felt the tragic, unseen presence of a suffering which, with all that she had suffered, had been spared her. Instinctively she went across the other half of the room and put her baby in Alison's arms. After all, they seemed to know how to hold a baby.

VII

THE leopard cannot change his spots, and the Rev. Sylvester had not forgiven his mother.

In a week he had grown accustomed to her surprising youthful loveliness, and rebuked himself for the pride he had taken in his relation to it. He had touched pitch, and had been defiled. This was the mother who had deserted him in his helpless infancy, and there was something poignant, personally unforgivable in that offense, even if he could have brought himself to forgive the sin of adultery. He had consented to this reconciliation—his mother was not supposed to know how reluctantly—and she had tripped to meet him with her careless knees in silk stockings, and had gone down on them, not to accept his forgiveness, but to play light-heartedly with his baby.

He rebuked himself for his levity over the knitted woolen shawl. It was a more suitable garment for a clergyman's mother—even if she did look only half her age—than these "cords of vanity to draw iniquity" which, between the Monday of her arrival and this present Saturday, she had worn in such ungodly variety that he shuddered to think what she might display before his congregation on the Sabbath. Duty is duty, and, if a little private satisfaction can be got out of its performance, wherefore not?

"Mother," said Sylvester, after Saturday evening prayers, "may I have a word with you about to-morrow? I hope you won't think me harsh if I make the suggestion, but it is not considered good taste, here with us, to dress extravagantly for church."

"Is it anywhere?" asked Alison.

She attended Sunday morning service in a dark Kasha costume, dark furs, and a little dark cloche, in which she looked so distractingly lovely that the attention of the Rev. Sylvester's goats wandered from the pulpit to her pew.

The next Sunday, most of his ewes and lambs wore shorter skirts. One or two of them had been shingled, and had copied his mother's hat. Before the end of a fortnight the males of the flock were pasturing freely at the rector's tea table, and some of them stayed so long after tea that he was furiously obliged to ask them to stop to dinner.

Sylvester fed the poor of his parish liberally, but he regarded his own scones and crumpets and saddle of mutton as the Levite's portion. He sternly resented this informal gathering of parishioners at his table. When he perceived that Marjorie delighted in it, he felt that his mother's presence was a menace to his hearth and fold, and longed for nothing so much as to be rid of her.

There was no love lost between them. When Sylvester's eyes ceased to admire, Alison recovered her cold repugnance to his likeness to his father. His brief appeal had been to her vanity, not her tenderness. She had found her little lost boy in baby Sylvester. She felt something very near dislike for the grown son.

They were too well bred people. Sylvester was a trifle provincial but sincerely courteous, and Alison wore a mask with practiced ease. They talked together amicably, and showed each other small attentions. Between them and their good manners, they hoodwinked Marjorie into the happiest Christmas of her life.

Marjorie had not forgotten suffering. She remembered it gratefully. It had been given her to suffer in order to cure Syl's fatal jealousy and unite him to his mother. She would never have any more babies to love, but she had these two for her children, and was rich in love.

When Alison's visit was nearly over, and Sylvester was piously thanking God for it,

Marjorie pressed her to stop another month.

"You know you don't want to leave your baby, dear, and Syl and I will love to have you with us longer."

"I'd love it, too," said Alison, smiling ironically at her son.

She stayed to punish him for his priggishness, more than to please herself. She was beginning to pine for her place in the world.

A portrait of "Lord George Hungerstone, an early arrival at Bath," distinguished a page of one of the society papers, which Mrs. Hayden devoured in exile. Left behind in London, Hungerstone had tracked his cold love into Somersetshire, and had discovered what she was doing there. For him, she might as well have been in the moon. He guessed that the letter which had agitated her on the Riviera had been the overture to this reconciliation with her son, and he delicately retired, unseen, to take the waters at Bath.

He was being petted and led about the Pump Room, when he was called to the phone.

"Is that you, Hungerstone?"

"No."

"I want Lord George Hungerstone."

"I wanted to hear you admit it."

"Idiot! I'm quite near you. I'm speaking from my son's house—the rectory, Closecoombe."

"No, really?"

"Come over in the morning and take me back to Bath for the day."

"Thank you! My regards to infant Sylvester."

In the morning Hungerstone was presented to infant Sylvester and his young parents, and was startled when he met the Rev. Sylvester's watching eyes. He decided that the remarkable resemblance to old Secret Service was only skin deep, when he saw the happy content in Marjorie's. He was pressed to stay for dinner at the rectory when he brought Mrs. Hayden back from Bath, and he stayed and dined there.

Hungerstone's manner toward Mrs. Hayden had been cultivated for years, to conceal his passion, and her manner toward him was sincerely unsentimental. At dinner he devoted himself to a young hostess whom he thought charming, and he was Marjorie's first man of the world. Born into the same world, she had lived in a

country corner of it, her single appearance in smart society having been in the pages of *Vogue*. Men with the manners of Lord George were not included in her experience—or in Sylvester's.

To Sylvester's provincial eyes, this was the way of the seducer. He saw a man old enough to be Marjorie's father, with black hair already white at the temples, with a lean, weathered face, distinguished, perhaps, but far from beautiful, skillfully drawing Marjorie from her usual shyness with strangers into little adventures of gaiety, mysteriously pleasing and interesting her. He saw Hungerstone using the secret fascination of the serpent for the dove, and, before the fish was carried away from his dinner table, Sylvester's beast was snarling in its sleep.

If he had been asked, that night, he would have sworn that he could never again be jealous of his wife. His temper had sometimes been teased by the young men of the parish; but, though the leopard cannot change its spots, it can be taught to cringe by the red-hot bar, and Sylvester remembered punishment. It was only in his soul that he raved now. He raved against his mother for bringing Hungerstone into the house, against himself for bringing his mother into the house, against his wife for making him bring his mother into the house.

It would have been better for his soul if he had raved aloud, like his father. There was something healthier in that open, raging jealousy of old Sylvester Murrow's than this secret, malignant growth forming again on his son's brain.

For the next month the Bath Pump Room saw little of Lord George Hungerstone, and the rectory at Closecoombe saw a good deal. His car was parked at the door, his hat was in the hall, and he himself was in the drawing-room, five days out of seven. Boxes of flowers and the famous delicacies of Bath arrived at the rectory, as often addressed to Marjorie as to Alison. There were no pale looks, now, to reproach Sylvester with his sin and his wife's suffering. Before young Secret Service knew it, he was back on the job.

The Rev. Sylvester had his parochial duties to attend to, his sermons to write, and an address to prepare for a coming clerical congress in London. He neglected them, all three, to watch his wife with Hungerstone. Although he never saw them

alone together, his imagination worked as grotesquely as his father's.

At the end of the month he was called to his convention, but Marjorie excused herself from going with him to London.

"Why, Syl! You know we can't both leave your mother."

Sylvester went alone, raging with the suspicion that it was not his mother, but Hungerstone, whom his wife could not leave.

Away from them, suspicion fastened in his mind until it burst in one of his father's frenzies. He scarcely ate or slept, torturing himself with lurid visions of what was happening at the rectory in his absence. By the time the London congress was over, he was as mad as his father.

Sylvester held his father's view that a man who has any doubts about his wife has every right to make sure. He wrote to his wife, telling her what night to expect his return, and came back late, and secretly, the night before.

Nature is witty, as *Peer Gynt* discovered when he pulled the onion to pieces. She is also dramatic. She staged a world for madmen on the night of the Rev. Sylvester Murrow's return to his home. The wind howled, the rain fell in sheets. There was no one at the station, except a sleepy porter, to see him step from the train. There was no one abroad, on the long road from the station, to see him running, storm-driven from within and without, all the way from the station to the rectory. There was no one looking from the rectory windows to see him come stealthily through his own gates.

Hungerstone's car was at the door. No lights showed at the front of the house, except from the nursery windows on the second floor, and, as Sylvester looked up, he saw his mother's figure silhouetted on the white blind. Even the hall light had been exhausted that evening, and had not been replaced. Everything worked for confusion and disaster in his brain.

A path ran off from the drive, behind tall, thick shrubbery, and came out at the side of the house, under the back drawing-room windows, where the curtains were never drawn. Sylvester struck furiously into this path, and into total darkness. In his violence, he stumbled into the bushes every few steps.

The cracking branches warned him to be more careful, as he came near the house.

He was fearful, too, of being seen in the light from the windows, which fell on the end of the path. The rest of the way he went crouching, almost creeping, like a beast stalking its prey.

VIII

ALISON had just come down from the nursery. There was a broad one-step landing at the bottom of the stairs, opposite the back drawing-room door, and opposite the windows, one on each side of the fireplace. As she reached this landing, she looked into the room and saw a face raised cautiously above the sill outside one of the windows, and pressed against the glass.

She shrank back on the stairs, shuddering in the grip of an old, unforgettable terror. On countless dark nights she had seen this face, raised outside the window of some room where she had hidden from Sylvester Murrow, and pressed like this against the glass. For a moment she believed that she saw her dead husband again. Then she recognized Sylvester's face; and its resemblance to his father's, which always chilled her, seen, now, stamped with his father's mania, froze her blood.

So swift is thought! It was only seconds before Alison acted, but in that brief space her mind fled backward over the weeks she had spent at the rectory, searching for impressions, found and considered them, considered a plan, and returned to the present with her swift decision. It was incredible that with half her brain registering only horror, and her eyes engaged with it, the other half should function sanely and logically, reach conclusions not so wide of truth, and tick them off methodically, like a machine.

Her son had inherited his father's mania—at the thought, she had time for pity—but this phase of it had not declared itself before to-night. Her terrible familiarity would have discovered it, Marjorie's unhappiness would have betrayed it. He was jealous of his wife and Hungerstone. He had concealed it from Marjorie, who was only too easy to deceive. During his absence from them he had worked himself into a frenzy, and he had returned the night before he was expected, in order to spy on them.

In the mirror over the fireplace Alison saw them sitting on a couch, facing the

window—Hungerstone with that loverlike manner of his for all women, Marjorie raptly interested. She remembered what Sylvester Murrow had made of less than this, when he spied on herself and Hayden. In Sylvester's eyes, fixed on them, she read his father's mind, and, swiftly gathering, a dreadful purpose which had never been in his father's.

Horror, then, would have clouded all her brain, but she had no time for horror. Sylvester was a stronger and more dangerous man—he would act, in his madness, where his father had only raved. At the same time he was colder and more cautious, and was capable of reasoning, as Sylvester Murrow never was—if his reason could be reached before tragedy overwhelmed them all.

Alison had determined on an act of sacrifice. She had never sacrificed herself for another in her life, and the sacrifice that she must make was the greatest that could have been asked of her. She did not consider herself at all, and what she did was rather splendid.

She darted across the hall to the door, waited for a second, to see, in the glass, that she was smiling naturally, and went a little way into the room.

"George!"

Hungerstone, boundlessly astonished, kept his cool head, and went to her as nonchalantly as if Mrs. Hayden had never called him anything but "George." She put her hands on his shoulders, and whispered something.

A man may have a cool head, may keep it for twenty-three years, and then may lose it. Sylvester, crouching under the window to spy on him and his own wife, saw Lord George Hungerstone passionately kissing his mother.

"You'd better tell Marjie that you're going to marry me, and relieve her mind," cried Alison, her own mind in no small disorder.

She clung to Marjorie, laughing hysterically, as she saw Sylvester's face, sane, at the window. She held his wife and Hungerstone until she saw him turn away and disappear. Then she sat down weakly on the couch, and listened to Marjorie's delighted congratulations.

Shock has its salutary powers, as well as its dangers. It depends on the subject and the circumstances. It was the only cure for Sylvester, in a moment when gen-

tlar means could not have restored his reason, lost in the turmoil of his brain.

He had come prepared to punish, if he found what he expected to find in his home. His ravening desire to punish had been fed by the influences of the night—the solitary journey, with his tortured thoughts, the raging storm, the darkness, the excitement of his stealthy approach, the discovery of his wife alone with Hungerstone, when they believed him away. To his disordered fancy, this was enough to convict them.

He did not mean to wait—in his madness, he could not have waited—to see more. He was in haste to punish. He felt the savage joy of it, its irresistible urge. His hand was creeping to his pocket when his mother came into the room.

Sanity brought him torment and despair. What he had meant to do in that moment now seemed to him much less a sin than what he had already done. If he had destroyed his wife's body, the law would have held him to account. For the wanton destruction of his faith in her purity, he must account to himself. He turned from the window back into the path behind the shrubbery, stumbling, again in darkness—and wanting darkness, as Jonah wanted it, to hide himself from God.

Alison dismissed Hungerstone, and all thought of him, and her confusion, and Marjorie's excited congratulations, and went to her room.

Shock had done for her what it had done for Sylvester. Her cold aversion from her son had been swept away by the discovery that his physical likeness to his father was the least part of his tragic inheritance. She had seen sanity and bitter contrition in his face when he turned from the window. She thought of the torment of her own youth, when he had been her only comfort. For the first time, since her heart had been estranged from her grown son, she thought of him as that little child, loved him yearningly, and yearned to comfort him.

She did not think of the damage to her beauty, as she wept through the hours of darkness, waiting and listening for him to come in. It was dawn when she heard him moving about in his study, which was under her room. She slipped a wrap over her nightdress, took a tray that she had ready, and went down to him.

Sylvester had thrown himself on a couch. He started violently to his feet when he heard some one come into the study. He

was not prepared with an explanation of his return to his home like a thief in the night, and his exhausted brain refused to help him. He stood at bay, in the haggard light of dawn, in his drenched and mud-stained clothes, speechless, shaking from head to foot, staring wildly at his mother.

Closing the door, she passed him quickly, to put the tray on the table, and bent over it to light the spirit lamp.

"I heard you come in. You didn't wake Marjie—she's sleeping up in the nursery, with the baby. What possessed you to rush down on a night like this, when she wasn't expecting you till morning? I knew you'd have to walk from the station, and would be soaked. I had some brandy in my room. This water's hot—it will boil in a second."

She busied herself at the tray, without looking at him, mixed the brandy and hot water, and handed him the glass.

"Thank you, mother."

He drank some of the brandy, comforted by the warmth, comforted by his mother's unconcerned manner, and by her matter-of-fact reference to his appearance in his study, drenched to the skin, at dawn. Moreover, he was immeasurably comforted by a human presence. Unconsciously he drew nearer to it, in a dependence that was touching.

"Come, finish your brandy, get off these wet things, and get to bed," Alison said brusquely, seeing how near he was to breaking down and undoing what she had done for him. Trembling to take him in her arms, she turned to the door. "Good night! You'd better sleep as late as you can. You look fagged to death. I'll tell Marjie you're home, in the morning."

If, during the night, there was no room in Mrs. Hayden's thoughts for her engagement to Lord Hungerstone, they concentrated uneasily on it in the morning.

A week ago they had arranged to lunch somewhere out in the country that day. They would be alone together all day, and they were engaged. Her cheeks colored faintly. She had not expected passion from Hungerstone, nor had she expected to feel emotion herself, as she had, through all her desperate anxiety, when he held her in his arms. She did not want emotion in her life. She had not loved the men who had loved her. She did not want to love Hungerstone, or to marry him or any man. She did not want a man in her life.

She heard his car in the drive, and began to put on her furs slowly, considering how, and how soon, she could break this engagement. To tell the truth about Sylvester was unthinkable. To treat last night as a joke—the vulgarity of such a joke would disgrace her, and Hungerstone would know that she would not have stooped to it. To tell him that she had a reason for making use of him, without telling him the reason, was also unthinkable. To quarrel with him meant to end a friendship that was an agreeable habit of years. She liked Hungerstone better than any man she knew.

Still troubled and undecided, she went downstairs and saw him alone in the hall, coming quickly to meet her, his eyes warm and eager. She stopped on the landing at the bottom of the stairs.

"Good morning! Freezing cold, isn't it?" she said, unconscious that the weather had got into her eyes and her voice.

"Good morning!" He shook hands casually. "We'd better stop at the garage, hadn't we, and get a foot muff from your car? It's cold now, but the sun will warm things up in another hour."

On the way to the garage for the foot muff, and all through the hour while the sun warmed things up, he talked cheerfully of anything except what was disturbing Mrs. Hayden's mind. She understood, then, that he did not intend to be the first to refer to their engagement.

What on earth could he be thinking of it, and of her? She looked at him sharply. He was quite unembarrassed, gave her his quizzical smile when he met her eyes, and was as agreeable and as impudent as usual—entirely himself. It might have been yesterday morning, instead of to-day. There might have been no last night. She would not be surprised, she thought, if he made her one of his offers of marriage.

"I thought we'd pull up for lunch at a place out in the hills, where they do ducks. It's just a run up to lunchtime. Ever been there, Alison?"

"No."

"Funny old shop—funny old girl turns 'em on a spit till you say when—looks as if she'd been doing it without stopping for a couple of hundred years. Raw celery stuffing, tops and all—great idea! I've brought some lemons—I'll bet she's never seen a lemon—and cayenne, with the wine."

At the place where they did ducks, Hungerstone put the Burgundy to warm, sprin-

kled the cayenne on the lemons, squeezed the lemons over the celery, and watched the stuffing and spitting of ducks, as if this were the absorbing interest of his life. Mrs. Hayden noticed that he ate all his duck. She picked absently at hers.

"Don't you like it?" he asked, full of concern—on the subject of ducks.

"Delicious!"

While they drank their coffee and smoked their cigarettes, one at each side of the enormous chimney corner in the "funny old shop," he told her that he was going back to London by a late train, and asked her, as casually as he had shaken hands, to ring him up as soon as she got to town.

IX

THE rectory drawing-room had been considerably left to the lovers. When they returned, at five o'clock, the Rev. Sylvester and his wife and baby were not at home. Hungerstone would just have time, he said, for a cup of tea with Mrs. Hayden. He drank two, praised the scones, and got up to take leave of his *fiancée*, and all the world might have looked on.

"Make my farewells—sorry not to have seen them. Salute infant Sylvester. Good-by, Alison."

"Good-by."

Well, of course—George Hungerstone! Why should she have expected him to take anything seriously? He took nothing seriously. Last night, perhaps, for a moment—

She colored again, faintly. Oh, well, all men had such moments of—well, not love. Hungerstone loved her amusingly, made his proposals amusing, and played an amusing game of racing around the world after her to propose. She smiled as she remembered that this was the first time she had been left behind. If she had been willing to marry him, he would have made an amusing game of marriage. As she was not—

Mrs. Hayden suddenly stopped philosophizing over George Hungerstone—smitten again by surprise. He had carried off the day so carelessly that toward the end of it she had forgotten how mysteriously he had discovered that she did not wish to marry him, after engaging herself to him, of her own free will, the night before.

He had not reproached her. He had asked no explanation, shown no curiosity.

He had gone away, she knew, to save her from embarrassment before the others. He had saved her from embarrassment when alone with him. He had given her a pleasant day and gone away. And Hungerstone really wanted to marry her, whether for amusement or for some other reason.

She thought of other men who loved her more dearly, she believed, than Hungerstone knew how to love, and who wanted to marry her. Would any of them have released her so delicately, or even have guessed that she wished to be released?

She thought of Captain Hayden. He had loved her, she believed, as passionately as a man could love a woman. She had gone to Hayden in blind grief, and he had taken her and made her his mistress for nine years—nine years of bitter humiliation, for twenty years a barrier between herself and her son. If some one had helped her in another way that night, she could have claimed Sylvester when his father died, could have known his love, could even have saved him, perhaps, from his unhappy heritage. Hayden had not thought of her—he had thought of himself.

If she had gone, that night, to Hungerstone, he would not have taken her. He would have found some other way. He would not have thought of himself, but only of her.

Mrs. Hayden burst into tears.

There was little that Lord George Hungerstone did not see on his amusing way

through life, and little that did not amuse him. What he saw in Mrs. Hayden's eyes, when he crossed the rectory hall to meet her at the bottom of the stairs, was the end of his brief engagement, and it did not amuse him. He did not understand why she had engaged herself to him, nor did he seek to understand. He understood enough. She did not wish to be held to her engagement. She did not wish to marry him. He released her in his own way.

When he returned to London, he shut himself up in his town house. He had been there a week, and was sitting in his library, when the telephone rang in the room. His man came in to answer it, as Hungerstone put the receiver to his ear.

"Is this Lord George Hungerstone's house?"

Lord George Hungerstone covered the mouthpiece, kept the receiver to his ear, and called his man to the phone.

"Answer this," he said. "Keep your eyes on me."

"Hello! Is this Lord George Hungerstone's house?"

"Yes, madam."

"Is his lordship at home?"

"No, madam."

"When his lordship comes in, please give him a message. I want you to be most particular to give the exact words. Please tell his lordship that Mrs. Hayden is in London, at her own house, and wants Lord George Hungerstone."

THE END

ONLY YOUR LOVE

ONLY your love is the blue of the sky
And the coral-kissed blush of the cloud;
Only your voice are the breezes that sigh
To the flowers of the troth that we vowed.

The gladness of noon is the gleam of your smile,
Night's mystery the calm of your soul—
A ravishing forest whose perfumes beguile
My spirit to dreamland's vague shoal.

There was night in my heart ere I found you, my love,
The dull muteness of death and despair;
You pointed the path to the raptures above,
When you gave me your beauty to share.

But only your love is the blue of the sky
And the coral-kissed blush of the cloud;
Only your voice are the breezes that sigh
To the flowers of the troth that we vowed.

William A. Drake

The Wonderful Little Woman

MRS. FREMBY DEMONSTRATES HER ENERGY, COURAGE, AND EFFICIENCY, WITH SOMEWHAT UNEXPECTED RESULTS

By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

THE clock struck midnight, but Mrs. Fremby did not even glance up from her work. She had an old skirt stretched over the transom, so that the landlady could not see that the light was still on. The door was locked. She was safe, and very snug.

Outside, a preposterous storm raged. It was almost the beginning of April, yet it snowed, and the wind howled. Let it! Mrs. Fremby had a forbidden electric heater glowing richly before her. It could not warm the vast and dingy front parlor that she inhabited, but it could and did keep her feet warm. The flame of righteous indignation in her heart helped, too, as she wrote:

At last the American woman has definitely rebelled. She refuses any longer to accept unquestioned the dictates of Paris as to what she shall or shall not wear. This season it is plain to any impartial observer that the influence of the French capital is distinctly on the wane.

Heavens, how she hated Paris! For years and years she had been fighting its insidious influence upon American modes. Even when, in order to earn her daily bread, she was obliged to describe what *milady* had worn at the Longchamp races, she always managed to get in some clever bit of propaganda—something like this, for instance:

A certain American woman of unimpeachable social standing attracted considerable attention by her costume of this and that, made in New York, and showing in every line a skillful adaptation to the American type.

What if this independent American woman of unimpeachable standing was an in-

vention of Mrs. Fremby's? Never having been within thousands of miles of Longchamp, she was obliged to invent a little, and this mythical creature was very real to her, and dear. She could absolutely see that "American type," tall, proud, and beautiful, completely dominating all the *Parisiennes*.

Mrs. Fremby herself was small. That was her misfortune; but she made the most of herself. Even now, in an old and faded dressing gown, she was a mighty smart, trim little woman, and, if she was not pretty, she had the wit to know it, and to behave accordingly. Her good points were her miniature figure, which was excellent, and her crown of glittering, wiry red hair, which she arranged with much skill. The very foundation of style, she often said, was individuality, and she had it.

"The modes of this season will be marked by—" she was writing, when there was a knock at the door.

Mrs. Fremby got up. Swiftly and noiselessly she detached the heater and thrust it, still red-hot, into a cupboard under the washstand. Then, with a lofty expression of annoyance, she went to open the door; but it was not the landlady—it was Judith Cane.

"My dear!" cried Mrs. Fremby. "Come in!"

Judith came in. Snowflakes were melting upon her furs, her eyelashes were damp, and there was a fine color in her cheeks. She was indeed a superb creature, tall, dark, and beautiful, the physical embodiment of that "American type" who should have attracted considerable attention at

Longchamp. Unfortunately, however, she lacked a certain vital quality—animation, Mrs. Fremby would have said, but in the office of the *Daily Citizen* they called it "bean." They said in that office that Judith was beautiful but dumb.

Mrs. Fremby, however, was not one to pick flaws in her friends. She was loyal, even to the point of prejudice. She was devoted to Judith, and she acknowledged no faults in her.

"Sit down, my dear child," she said.

As Judith did so, she locked the door again, and hastened about, making hospitable preparations. She connected the heater again, and also a small electric grill. The light grew perilously dim.

"They ought to put in a larger meter," observed Mrs. Fremby, with the air of an electrical expert. "I can't make coffee, my dear. It smells; but we'll have tea and rolls, and some perfectly delicious Bologna. Isn't it wretched weather?"

"Yes," said Judith. "And there I sat, rewriting and rewriting that article about smoking accessories for Mr. Tolley, and in the end he killed it!"

"Beast!" said Mrs. Fremby.

She remembered how Mr. Tolley had once described Judith.

"She is," he had said, "a space writer—which means that she fills blank space in a blank manner."

"Never mind!" she went on. "I've got a thing here that ought to run to a column, if you pad it a little. We'll fix it up, and you can turn it in to-morrow. Now, my dear, do tell me!"

"I've lost," said Judith.

"I knew it!" cried Mrs. Fremby. "I felt it all along! What an outrage!"

It was a question here of an orphan child. The child's mother had been Judith's sister, and upon the sister's decease Judith had put in a claim for the custody of the infant. According to all the laws of justice and humanity—as interpreted by Mrs. Fremby—Judith should have got the infant, but another woman, a sister of the mere father, had likewise put in a claim; and as this woman had a very wealthy husband, and a home, and other things which surrogates deem advantageous for infants, and Judith had none of these, the other claimant had triumphed.

"It's an outrage!" Mrs. Fremby repeated. "You'll fight it, of course?"

Judith shed a few melancholy tears.

"I don't know, Evelyn," she said.

"Don't know! You must!"

"It's so expensive, Evelyn. Even if I got the poor little thing, I don't know what I could do with her. I only made twelve dollars last week."

Mrs. Fremby recognized in her friend a mood which exasperated her—a large, vague despair and resignation.

"You ought to know that I'll always help you till you get on your feet," she said sternly.

"I do know," said Judith, shedding more tears; "but it seems to take me so long to get on my feet! All I do is—to get on your feet."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Fremby.

She had, in her heart, no very great illusions about Judith's ability to earn money, but what did that matter? Judith wanted her niece, and what Judith wanted she ought to have. That was nothing more than justice.

"Judith, I'm going to handle this," she announced.

"Don't do anything—awful," said Judith. "You know, Evelyn, you're so—"

Mrs. Fremby smiled as if she had received a compliment.

"Leave it to me," she said. "Just drink your tea, my dear child, and don't worry."

So Judith, with a sigh, let slip the burden from her magnificent shoulders.

II

It was a riotous sort of day. The wind went rampaging about Central Park, and the sun laughed down upon the gay confusion of tossing branches, just beginning to grow green. In sheltered spots traces of snow still lingered, but it was melting very fast. The ground was soft, the iron thrall of winter was loosed.

It was not quite the sort of Sunday that Miss Mackellar could approve of. The wind disarranged her hair, and the promise of spring troubled her spirit. Her feet hurt, too. She sat down upon a bench and buttoned her voluminous plaid coat tightly about her, and, as the young child whose governess she was ran around and around the bench, she said "Woo!" each time the child appeared before her.

She did this with all the fervor she could command, for she was fond of the little girl, and she was a conscientious woman; but she knew that she failed. The child

was generously giving her every chance to be entertaining while sitting still, and she was not being entertaining. Before long she would be obliged to rise and limp off in quest of ducks and squirrels, who could do better.

"Woo!" she said once more.

"What is it 'at says 'Woo'?" asked the child. "Bears?"

"Yes, pet — bears. Big, brown, woolly bears."

"Do bears run after you?"

"No, pet. They sit in their dark, dark caves and say 'Woo.'"

"I don't like bears," said the child flatly.

Miss Mackellar could think of no other retort than a fresh "Woo," but it was not accepted.

"I like tigers," said the child; "tigers 'at pounce."

"Look out, then!" cried a gay voice. "I'm a tiger! And I pounce! Gr-r-r!"

It was a trim, brisk little red-haired woman who had just come around the turn in the path. In fact, like a real tiger, she had been lurking there in ambush for some time, watching and waiting unsuspected.

"Gr-r-r!" she said again, moving forward with gleaming eyes and outstretched claws.

The little girl was delighted. With shrieks of joy she ran behind the bench, pursued by this wholly satisfactory tiger. Around and around they went, the brisk little woman as indefatigable as the child.

But the dejected Miss Mackellar had a conscience which hurt her even more than her shoes. She believed that life was very hard and painful, and that if it wasn't, then you were certainly doing wrong. She felt that she had no right to sit there and be comfortable.

"It's very kind of you, I'm sure," she said to Mrs. Fremby—for the tiger was that lady; "but really I shouldn't let you. I ought—"

"It's a pleasure," Mrs. Fremby assured her. "I am very much in harmony with children. Gr-r-r!" She disappeared around the bench again. "In fact," she continued, when she reappeared, "I wrote a series of articles once upon 'Scientific Play.' Play is really work, you know."

"Indeed it is!" Miss Mackellar agreed, with a sigh.

"I mean for the child. It is in play that a child develops those qualities of—aha!

Gr-r-r!" And again she was gone. "Now then!" she said, addressing the child. "The tiger's going to hide around the corner, by those bushes, and you'd just better not look for it!"

Miss Mackellar could not help feeling glad that the lively game was now a little removed from her bench. She did not, however, believe in luck, unless it was bad, and she wondered earnestly why this little interlude of peace was granted to her. Perhaps it was to give her a chance to think about serious things. She did so.

But wasn't it almost too quiet? Hunter and tiger had vanished around the corner. That had happened half a dozen times before, but this time it seemed so long—

Miss Mackellar rose to her feet with a worried frown.

"I shouldn't let that child out of my sight," she thought. "I am failing in my duty! They'll have to come back and stay where I can see them, or"—she sighed—"or I suppose I'll have to follow where they go."

She walked around the turn of the path. No one in sight!

She walked on a little. She stopped to listen. Not a sound!

Then she went back to the bench and called:

"Natalie! Natalie!"

It is strange what a sinister effect may be caused by calling a person who does not answer. As soon as she had called, Miss Mackellar grew really frightened. She actually ran up the path, and, meeting a nursemaid with a perambulator, she cried:

"Oh, did you see a little girl with a tiger? No—I mean a little girl in a pink hat and a red-haired woman?"

"Er-huh," said the nursemaid, staring hard at her. "Just a minute ago—goin' up that way, to the entrance, walking terrible fast."

"Oh, Heavens!" cried Miss Mackellar, ashen white. "Oh, stop them, somebody! The child has been kidnaped!"

The nursemaid also turned pale.

"Oh, my!" she exclaimed. "I never! Then I'd better get *this* baby home, quick as ever I can!"

And she set off with her perambulator at a dangerous rate of speed.

The luckless Miss Mackellar stood in the middle of the path, clasping her trembling hands, and trying in vain to make her panic-stricken brain function lucidly.

What she really wanted to do was to scream.

"No, no!" she said to herself. "I must keep calm. Oh, there's a policeman! But I don't know—perhaps that's the wrong thing to do. It might get into the newspapers, if I tell a policeman, and Mr. Donalds is always so angry at newspapers. Oh! Oh! If they had only come to me and told me they were going to steal the child, I'd have been glad to draw all my money out of the savings bank and hide it under a tree for them! That's what they always seem to want some one to do. Of course I know I wouldn't have enough, but—oh, my precious Natalie! Oh, Mr. Donalds! Oh, my poor darling Natalie!"

She began to cry.

"I'll go to Mr. Donalds this instant," she thought. "I don't care what happens to me. Let them put me in jail—that's where I ought to be! It's all my fault!"

Off she went, as fast as her shaking knees and her fluttering heart permitted; and this is her last personal appearance in this story, for any account of her interview with her employer would be too painful to set before a humane reader.

Only let it be said that she survived—that when Mr. Donalds rushed out of his house on East Seventy-Fourth Street, Miss Mackellar was still breathing. He had at first intended to take her with him, to identify persons and places, but even he could see the uselessness of doing so. She was in no condition to identify anything. She was beginning to rave about the child's having been carried off by a tiger; so he left her behind.

Like a stone from a catapult he shot out of his house and down the street toward the park. He had no intention of allowing the police to interfere with his private affairs. He believed he knew very well who had stolen the child, and why.

"Very well, madam!" he said to himself. "We shall see!"

III

MR. DONALDS knew that the child would suffer no bodily harm, and he was confident of his ability to snatch her away from contaminating moral influences before serious injury to her character could result. Mr. Donalds never failed. If he did not always accomplish exactly what he set out to do, at least he did something else which seemed to him just as good.

He knew that in this case he would succeed, as usual, and therefore he was able to devote his mind to being angry. His fury rose within him like steam, actually seeming to inflate him, so that he bounced rather than walked. A short, stoutish man he was, with a pale Napoleonic face and a piercing glance—a man of tremendous energy and determination.

Sometimes, however, he was a man of too little patience and deliberation. This morning, for instance, although he had thought to take his hat and his walking stick, he had forgotten to change his slippers. He was wearing red morocco slippers that came up over the ankle, and not only were they conspicuous, but they were too thin for outdoor walking.

However, it was not his way to turn back, and forward he went. He entered the park and proceeded direct to the spot where Miss Mackellar said she had last seen the child. He looked for clews. There were none.

He followed the course which the nursemaid had pointed out to Miss Mackellar, and in due time he arrived at another entrance. There was a cab stand here, in which stood one taxi, with the chauffeur standing beside it, leisurely surveying the world in which we live. Mr. Donalds approached him.

"See here!" he said. "Did you happen to see a red-haired woman and a child in a pink hat come out of the park near here?"

"Yep," replied the man, without interest.

Mr. Donalds had not lived some fifty years for nothing. He knew how to inspire enthusiasm. He put his hand into his pocket.

"Yes, sir!" answered the driver promptly, in a brisk and earnest tone. "They came out here. I noticed 'em because she was in such a hurry. I thought there was something queer about it. Anyways, she took Wickey's cab."

"Where did they go?"

"Couldn't tell you that, sir. They started up the avenoo; but they might 'a' bin goin' anywhere."

"Where can I find this Wickey?" inquired Mr. Donalds.

"Well, I don't know, sir. He'll prob'ly come back here before long. Him and me are buddies, an' we gen'rally eat lunch together, if we can. O' course, lots o' times

we can't. F'r instance, I might have to go out any minute now."

"What's the number of his cab?"

"Don't know, sir—didn't notice. You see, we don't always take out the same one. Some days the one you're used to is laid up."

Mr. Donalds reflected hastily.

"I suppose I could find out by telephoning to the garage," he suggested.

"Yes, sir; but they wouldn't know where he went. Wouldn't do much good, unless you want to set the cops after him."

"No," said Mr. Donalds. "I'll handle this myself. You're fairly certain, then, that this Wickey will return here before going to his garage?"

"Expect to see him any minute now, sir."

"Very well, then—I'll wait here. I'll engage your cab. I'll pay you for your time until this Wickey comes," said Mr. Donalds.

He climbed into the cab, but he was very restless in there.

"Be sure Wickey doesn't pass by!" he called out of the window.

"Oh, he'd gimme a hail," the driver assured him. "Don't you worry, sir."

But time was flying. At least, time was undoubtedly flying for the nefarious red-haired woman, but for Mr. Donalds it passed with leaden foot. The chauffeur was smoking what Mr. Donalds was wont to call a "filthy cigarette," and though he had often declared that such things were not tobacco at all, still the aroma of this one put him painfully in mind of cigars. He had none with him. He grew more and more restless.

At last another cab came up, and its driver descended.

"Is that Wickey?" cried Mr. Donalds.

"No, sir," answered his especial driver. "Nother fellow."

"Ask him to go somewhere and buy me half a dozen cigars," said Mr. Donalds. "Tell him to get Havana perfectos."

This was soon done, and as he began to smoke, Mr. Donalds felt calmer; but a new and more serious craving now assailed him. He was in the habit of lunching promptly at one o'clock, and it was now half past one. The cab was hot with the sun blazing down upon it, and this, combined with the bad effects of boiling rage, sizzling impatience, and fast growing hunger, were impairing Mr. Donalds's health.

He felt positively ill. He threw away his third cigar half finished.

The driver approached the window.

"I'm going to get a bite to eat, sir," he said. "This here fellow knows Wickey. He'll stay till I get back."

"Just a minute!" said Mr. Donalds. "I—er—"

This was intensely distasteful to him, but he knew that without food he could not be at his best.

"Bring me back something to eat," he said; "something—er—small and not conspicuous, if possible."

Thus it was that Mr. Donalds, eminent business man and mirror of respectability, might have been seen eating a "hot dog" in a taxicab on Fifth Avenue on a Sunday afternoon. He had pulled down the blinds, had taken the first bite, and was discovering that he had never tasted anything so exquisite, so zestful—when the door was opened and a policeman looked in.

"Now, what's all this?" asked the policeman reproachfully. "This won't do, you know!"

Mr. Donalds managed to convince the officer that his presence was perfectly legitimate; but the incident disturbed him. He felt himself an outcast from society. He no longer relished the "hot dog," but he finished it.

Then he was assailed by a fearful thirst, and there is no knowing what might have happened next, if the elusive Wickey had not appeared.

"There he is!" cried Mr. Donalds's driver. "Hey, Wickey! Come here!"

Wickey approached.

"Yes," he said, in answer to Mr. Donalds's questions. "I took 'em out to a place on the Boston Post Road—long run. I jest got back—empty to City Island; then I picked up a fare."

"Take me to the place where you left the woman," said Mr. Donalds.

"Sorry, sir," said Wickey, "but I can't afford to take the chance of comin' back empty."

"Oh, I'll pay!" shouted Mr. Donalds. "Don't waste any more time!"

IV

IN dust, in gasoline fumes, in an endless procession of cars, Mr. Donalds proceeded on his way. They stopped for gasoline, they stopped while Wickey investigated a knock in the engine, they stopped again

and again because the procession stopped. Signs told them to "go slow," and they went slow, until Mr. Donalds was on the verge of frenzy.

He tried to be calm. He reminded himself that he was a relentless human bloodhound, never to be eluded, and that no matter where the criminals went, were it to the very ends of the earth, they could not escape him. Even these thoughts could not appease him. He was hungry, he was extremely thirsty, and he was displeased with his red morocco slippers.

It is fortunate that he did not know how streaked with dust and perspiration his face was, how rumpled his stubby hair. As it was, when he caught any one staring at him, he believed it was because of the ruthless determination of his expression.

At last Wickey turned off the Post Road and stopped halfway down a lane, before a little old-fashioned cottage which bore this sign:

YE BETSY BARKER TEA HOUSE

"Here's where she went," said Wickey.

Mr. Donalds sprang out, and, bidding the man wait, opened the garden gate and advanced up the path. The cottage door was unlatched, and he entered, to find himself in a dim, cool little room, filled with small tables and high-backed settees.

There was no one else in the room. He had come in so quietly, in his slippers, that no doubt he had not been heard. He waited a moment, and then he rapped vigorously upon one of the tables.

Almost immediately there entered a thin little white-haired woman wearing a chintz apron.

"Tea?" she asked in a little bleating voice.

She was such a very respectable sort of little woman, and the atmosphere of the place was so very tranquil, that Mr. Donalds felt somewhat abashed.

"No, thank you," he said. "I'm looking for a woman with red hair and a child in a pink hat."

Suddenly the whole thing seemed to him so fantastic that he was almost apologetic—until he observed that the woman's face grew very pale.

"Ha!" he cried. "I see you know something of this! Then—"

"I—I—I—" she faltered. "You must be mistaken. I—I never heard of them. They've gone away."

"You contradict yourself, madam!" said Mr. Donalds sternly. "Come, tell me what you know—at once!"

"I—I—I—" said she, trembling with an alarm which he could not but think guilty. "Oh! Please go away!"

"Go away!" he repeated, affronted and amazed. "I have come here for the purpose of—"

She began to cry. Mr. Donalds had not been an employer of great numbers of female stenographers for years and years without learning to withstand tears. In fact, he had formed the notion that women generally cried whenever they had made a mistake, and that it was a feminine way of apologizing.

"Come, come!" he said. "Tell me where the child is—immediately!"

But all she did was to back into a corner and go on crying. Mr. Donalds was not profoundly moved. On the contrary, he was irritated.

"I shall search the premises," he announced, and made for the door.

The woman came after him, calling in a loud and terrified voice:

"Evelyn! Evelyn! Evelyn! Quick!"

This was undoubtedly a warning, and Mr. Donalds went forward very rapidly. He reached the foot of a narrow, boxed-in stairway, and had his foot on the bottom step, when, with a rustle of skirts and a click of high heels, down rushed a little human whirlwind, with such impetuosity that he had just time to spring aside.

"What do you mean by this?" the whirlwind demanded. "What's he been doing, Betsy?"

"He—he—he—" bleated the other.

Mr. Donalds was silent, staring at this new one. She had red hair. She had, moreover, the air of one who is capable of anything. He felt absolutely certain that she was the kidnaper; and he decided that he would confute, abash, and alarm her by a sudden onslaught.

"Come!" he shouted. "Where is the child? Quick! No nonsense! Where is the child?"

"Do you imagine I'm going to tell you?" said she.

He was very much taken aback and shocked by this unaccountable display of effrontery.

"Then you do not deny it?"

"Certainly not!" she replied calmly. "I admit it."

"Then stand aside! I shall search the house!"

"By all means," said she. "The more time you waste over it, the better for me."

Now, there might be some truth in this. He hesitated, scowling, staring at the criminal, who returned his stare without flinching. He saw that he had no ordinary person to deal with. This was a master mind.

"I shall call the police," he said, but he didn't mean it.

"Pray do!" said she.

It was Mr. Donalds's belief that those who could not be bullied must be bribed; so he changed his tone.

"Madam," he said, "my sole object is the recovery of the child. To accomplish this, I am willing—"

"Come into the tea room, Mr. Henderson," she interrupted, "and we'll discuss the matter. I can assure you that the child is quite safe and happy, and that you will accomplish nothing by violence. No, Mr. Henderson—the best thing you can do is to come to terms with me."

"My name is not Henderson," he began, but she had gone past him into the tea room, and he followed.

"Tea, Betsy dear!" said she. "For two, please!"

"No!" said Mr. Donalds. "I do not want tea!"

"And sandwiches," went on the red-haired woman, unperturbed. "And cake, if you please, Betsy dear. Sit down, Mr. Henderson!"

"I shall stand," said he, and stand he did, with his arms folded.

The woman sat down, and she said nothing. Mr. Donalds appreciated the cleverness of this silence. By saying nothing at all she had him at a disadvantage, for she did not mind waiting, and he did. He was obliged to begin.

"Well?" he demanded.

"Well!" she returned briskly.

There was another silence—quite a long one.

"I suppose," said Mr. Donalds, at last, "that you have some sort of terms to suggest. Let me hear them!"

"Certainly," said she; "but here's our tea. How nice! Thank you, Betsy dear!"

Mr. Donalds remained silent until the timid Betsy had set the tea out on the table and once more retired.

"Now!" he said grimly. "The terms, madam—the terms!"

"Mr. Henderson," she replied in a grave tone, "I wish you would sit down and take a cup of tea—and a sandwich. They're very nourishing sandwiches. I made them myself; and you *need* nourishment and refreshment. You are tired, and in an extremely nervous condition."

This was almost more than Mr. Donalds could bear. He struggled with his indignation for a moment, and then gave a short laugh.

"No doubt my pitiful condition distresses you very greatly," he observed, with biting sarcasm.

"It does," said she. "I am a good judge of character, and, since I have actually seen you, I am inclined to believe that you are not really a bad or heartless man. I feel now that what you have done, you have done more through lack of understanding than from deliberate cruelty."

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Donalds.

He was dazed. He sank heavily into a chair opposite her, and stared at her; and she actually smiled at him—smiled gravely but kindly.

"Good!" said she. "Now we can talk like two reasonable human beings. Milk and sugar?"

"It doesn't matter," said he, as if in a dream. "I don't want it, anyhow."

"I don't care much for tea myself," she told him; "but it is refreshing. A sandwich? If you don't like cheese, I'll get you—"

"I do like cheese," he admitted.

"Most men do," said she. "My poor husband was so fond of it! He was a newspaper man, and when he came home late I would make him a nice little Welsh rarebit, and he'd have that and a glass of beer. That was years ago, of course, when you could get beer."

She sighed, but Mr. Donalds understood that the sigh was only for her late husband, not for any other vanished joys.

"I do like to see a man comfortable!" she suddenly remarked.

He believed her. Extraordinary and preposterous as it was, he believed that she really wished *him* to be comfortable. She had prepared a cup of tea for him, and she watched him while he drank it and ate a sandwich—yes, two or three sandwiches—with the air of a solicitous hostess.

"Another cup?" she asked. "And now won't you smoke?"

"Thank you," said he.

He lit a cigar and took a few puffs. He really felt very much better now. The tea and the sandwiches had done him good, and the atmosphere of the place was most restful. The sun was sinking. Already the corners of the room were shadowy, and a shaft of mellow light from the window illuminated the woman's glittering hair in a singular fashion. Seen thus, and through a faint haze of tobacco smoke, she looked not exactly pretty, but certainly attractive, so straight was she, so trim, so smart, so self-possessed.

Mr. Donalds came to his senses with a start.

"The terms, madam!" he said—not savagely now, but firmly.

"Mr. Henderson," she replied, "I shouldn't like you to misunderstand me. Perhaps it is a weakness, but I shouldn't like you to think that my motives were unworthy."

"I—" he began, and stopped himself just in time. "I don't think so," he had been about to say, but that would never do; so he said nothing.

"I give you my word," she continued, in a voice almost sorrowful, "that I personally have nothing whatever to gain by this. My only object has been to secure justice for others."

"Justice!" repeated Mr. Donalds. "You call it justice to—"

"I do," said she. "Now please listen. First"—she paused—"first, that poor creature—that governess—"

"Ha!" cried Mr. Donalds. "Miss Mackellar! So she is a party to this!"

"No, she isn't. She's simply a victim, and I don't wish her to suffer for what isn't her fault. *Any one* could see what she is," the red-haired woman went on with great earnestness. "She's perfectly helpless. She's a victim of life—of man."

"I'm sure I—" he began indignantly.

"I'm sure you've frightened her. I'm sure you've discharged her."

"Naturally!"

"Well, then, the first article of our agreement must be this," said she. "Miss—Mackellar, you said? Miss Mackellar is to have an annuity of one thousand dollars a year."

"No!" shouted Mr. Donalds. "No! I refuse!"

"Then it's a deadlock," said she, and poured herself another cup of tea.

A silence.

"You assure me that the woman is absolutely innocent of any participation in the kidnaping?" demanded Mr. Donalds.

"Absolutely! Any one could see that. She's only a poor, muddled, tired little woman who does her best. She needs help, and you can very well afford to do this for her."

"Very well!" said Mr. Donalds. "I agree to this—outrage!"

To tell the truth, the red-haired woman's description of Miss Mackellar had rather touched him.

"Will you write it down, please?" said she. "Just say that you will provide an annuity of one thousand dollars a year for Miss Mackellar, as from the 10th of April, 1925."

She spoke in an efficient, businesslike tone, which somehow gave an air of plausibility to this incredible proposal, and he obeyed. He wrote on a page of his notebook, signed it, and put it on the table before him.

"And now," she went on, "you will agree to settle upon Judith, for life, an income of—"

"Judith!" he cried. "This is too much!"

"Write this," she said calmly, "and I shall at once take you to the child."

"This is blackmail!" he cried. "This is extortion!"

"Mr. Henderson," she replied sternly, "don't you think, in your heart, that you ought to do this for Judith? Think, Mr. Henderson! Think of all that poor Judith—"

"Who the devil is Judith?" he roared. "I never heard of her!"

"Mr. Henderson!"

"My name is not Henderson—I told you that before! My name is Donalds—William Donalds, importer. Here! Here's a card!"

From his pocket he pulled not one card, but many, and they fell all over the table.

"Donalds!" he repeated. "Now you know with whom you have to deal. This farce must end! This—"

He stopped, because such an extraordinary change had come over the woman. Her face had grown alarmingly white, and she was staring at him with a sort of horror.

"You—you *must* be Mr. Henderson!" she said faintly.

"I will not be!" he shouted. "I re-

fuse! Nothing can induce me to assume a false name! You have kidnaped my grandchild—"

"Your niece, you mean."

"I don't! I mean my grandchild. I have no niece. I—"

"Wait a minute!" she interrupted. She rose to her feet and stood, holding the back of the chair. "I'm afraid," she said, "that there's been—some terrible mistake!"

"You mean—the child? Quick! Something has happened to the child?"

"No," she said. "No—it's just—me."

Criminal though she was, he could not help feeling sorry for her.

"Madam, you are ill," he said. "Sit down again!"

She shook her head.

"Mr. Donalds," she said. "I—I must apologize. I'm afraid—it's the wrong child!"

"The wrong—"

"Yes. Please come!"

She went out of the room, and he followed her up the stairs. She opened the door of a room, and there, on a bed, he saw his grandchild, sleeping peacefully.

"No!" he whispered. "No—it's the right child!"

"It isn't the one I meant," said she.

He looked at her.

"Then you are not acting on behalf of my scoundrelly nephew, Masterton Donalds?" he said.

"I never heard of him."

"But I thought—he has made certain threats that he would attempt to force me to make him an allowance. I thought—"

"No," said the red-haired woman in a very low voice. "Take her! I'm sorry. It was all a mistake!"

V

JUDITH was waiting in Mrs. Fremby's room. She had been told to come there at six o'clock, in order to hear some news. She had come, and had found the room empty. Judith's nature, however, was not an impatient one. She waited, full of a calm confidence in her friend. She ate the entire contents of a bag of chocolates that she found on the table, she tried on Mrs. Fremby's hats, and then she sat down to read Mrs. Fremby's latest article, which began thus:

Paris no longer reigns undisputed over American modes. There is a distinct tendency—

The door opened, and Mrs. Fremby entered. As was her habit, she locked the door behind her. Then she smiled. It was a pretty sickly smile, but Judith was not observant.

"Hello, Judith!" she said.

"Hello, Evelyn!" answered Judith. "What is the news you said you'd have for me?"

Mrs. Fremby took off her hat and coat, and sat down.

"My dear," she said, "I'm sorry, but I can't tell you to-night. Later on—"

Judith's beautiful eyes filled with tears of disappointment.

"Oh, Evelyn!" she said. "I did hope there'd be something—something about little Doris, or at least an order for an article. I only have two dollars, Evelyn!"

"I'll lend you a little money," said Mrs. Fremby.

She spoke absent-mindedly, for she was calculating. The cost of that taxi had been terrific—and all for nothing! She was tired and downcast and miserable; but it was not her way to allow others to know such things. She reflected that after Judith was gone she could be as miserable as much and as long as she liked, but in the meantime—courage!

It was never a difficult matter to divert Judith's mind, and within a few minutes Mrs. Fremby had got her to talking about the spring costume she wished she could buy. It was scarcely necessary to listen. Mrs. Fremby was able to indulge in her own far from cheery thoughts.

There was a knock at the door. Mrs. Fremby rose and opened it promptly. It was the landlady. Let it be! There were no surreptitious cooking or heating processes going forward just now.

"There's a gentleman wants to see you, Mrs. Fremby," said the landlady, with perfect affability. "He's waiting down in the hall."

"I'll see him," said Mrs. Fremby. "Just a minute, Judith!"

With a firm step she left the room. At heart, though, she was by no means easy. She felt sure that this visitor was Mr. Donalds, and she was not very anxious to see him again.

It was Mr. Donalds. As she descended the stairs, she saw him standing, hat in hand, in the dimly lit hall, and her heart sank still lower. He was not a man to be trifled with. He was—

"Not a handsome man at all," thought Mrs. Fremby; "but distinguished-looking."

He came toward her. Their eyes met. They did not smile.

"Madam," said he, "I obtained your name and address from the—ah—person in the tea room."

"She ought to have known better," observed Mrs. Fremby.

"I succeeded in convincing her that I intended no harm," he went on; "and I wish to assure you that I bear no ill will."

Mrs. Fremby softened.

"I gave you a great deal of quite unnecessary trouble and anxiety," she said. "I regret it very much; but—perhaps I ought to explain. You see, there is a friend of mine—Judith Cane—who has a little niece, her own sister's child; and the father's people have taken the little girl away from her. It's shameful! Judith loves the child so much!"

"But surely the law might be resorted to in such—"

"The law!" said Mrs. Fremby scornfully. "They've got the law on their side; but what I wanted was justice—for Judith, I thought I'd steal the child, and force them to do something for Judith."

"But the risk!" cried Mr. Donalds. "Did you realize the risk you—"

"I don't care about risks," said Mrs. Fremby calmly. "Nobody would dare to do anything to me!"

Mr. Donalds knew well how absurd this statement was, yet he was impressed. The dauntlessness of this little woman!

"Judith knows nothing about it," she continued; "and I don't intend her to know until the thing's done."

"Madam! Mrs. Fremby! You don't mean that you propose to do this again?"

"Certainly I do."

"No!" he protested. "That must not be! You don't realize—"

"Yes, I do," she interrupted. "It's the only way; and this afternoon I saw that you—even a man like you—you were willing to make all sorts of concessions. Oh, I do wish!" she exclaimed. "I do wish you had been the right one!"

"Er—why?" asked Mr. Donalds, with a modest, downcast glance.

"Because we got on so well. I could discuss things with you. You were so reasonable—about that poor Miss Mackellar, for instance."

"Mrs. Fremby," he said solemnly, "I consider that you were in the right about Miss Mackellar. I mean to carry out your wishes in that matter."

"No!" she replied incredulously. "You can't mean that, after I caused you so much worry and—"

"You did me good," said he. "I don't mind admitting it. The example of your—your heroism—"

"Oh, no!"

"Your heroism," he repeated doggedly, "and your unselfish devotion to the interests of others—What is more, my grandchild is—is enthusiastic in your praise. Mrs. Fremby, allow me to say that you are a wonderful woman!"

Mrs. Fremby was deeply touched.

"Mr. Donalds," she said, "for you to say that—after what has happened—is magnanimous!"

"I mean it," said he; "but I most earnestly implore you not to do it again. The risk is—appalling! It is possible—it is highly probable—that I can be of some assistance to this friend of yours, this—er—Miss Judith. Whatever I can do, Mrs. Fremby, I will—anything authorized by law," he added a trifle anxiously.

"Mr. Donalds!" she cried. "Oh, Mr. Donalds! This is—oh, this is really too much! I never—I never in my life—"

He thought she was going to cry. She thought so too, for a moment, but with a pretty severe effort she recovered herself. She smiled. That smile completely finished Mr. Donalds.

"Mrs. Fremby," he said, "one thing more. I believe I told you that I was an importer—"

"I know. I've heard of your firm."

"Mrs. Fremby, I should be honored—it would be a favor to me—if you would come to our showroom to-morrow morning and pick out for yourself any one of the new model gowns from Paris—"

"Paris!" cried Mrs. Fremby. "Never!" Mr. Donalds was startled by her impassioned tone. "I wouldn't wear a Paris gown—not for anything!"

"Wouldn't wear a Paris gown!" he repeated, overcome. "I never before heard of a lady—"

Mrs. Fremby held out her hand, and he took it.

"You mustn't think I don't appreciate your generosity," she said. "It's just a matter of principle."

Again their eyes met.

"Wonderful little woman!" said he.

It was amazing, the difference that one word of six letters made in that phrase. Mrs. Fremby became quite confused.

"What can I do," continued Mr. Donalds, still holding her hand, "to mark my profound appreciation?"

Appreciation of what? Of Mrs. Fremby's kidnaping his grandchild? Strange that so practical a man as Mr. Donalds should become so curiously obtuse about

the clearest moral issues! Mrs. Fremby was undeniably a lawless, reckless, dangerous sort of creature.

"Mrs. Fremby," said he, "will you do me the honor of dining with me to-morrow evening?"

"Thank you, Mr. Donalds, I will," she replied, grave but very gracious.

And you may believe it or not, but neither of them doubted for a moment that it was an honor which she conferred upon him.

"INCOMING STEAMERS, DUE—"

My love is on the sea,
On her way back to me;
She's just aboard,
My own adored,
And soon her face I'll see.

From dangers of the deep,
Oh, Father Neptune, keep
My own beloved fair!
By "dangers of the deep" I mean
The perilous deck chair,
The *tête-à-tête* with heads that lean
Together 'neath the moon,
And manifestly spoon,
Careless who hears or sees.

To think, about her knees—
Oh, sweet and silken knees!—
Her steamer rug he tucks,
Some impudent young brute;
Deep in her eyes he looks,
And oh, she lets him do't!
She smiles upon the pup,
And hands him back her cup;
Even lets the fellow
Arrange her pillow!

Such thoughts I cannot bear!
May she have *mal de mer*,
So I'll be sure of her,
The whole trip over,
And not recover
Till Sandy Hook is sighted,
And she is out of danger
From sea and charming stranger,
Back to her own true plighted!

John Lewis Linton

Mrs. Rodger Collects Her Legacy

WHAT SHE FOUND IN HER DEAD HUSBAND'S SAFE-DEPOSIT BOX AT THE BANK IN AVONDALE

By Reita Lambert

MRS. RODGER was playing bridge, and, as usual, she was playing badly—a poorer game, indeed, than she generally played. Even Miss Carfax, who made it a point of friendship to partner Mrs. Rodger whenever possible, was flipping down her cards with fingers that twitched impatiently.

The room was stuffy. A sort of ambulatory fog of smoke and scent hung over the players' heads—neatly coifed heads, touched with gray, many of them—the heads of Avondale's most select and circumspect little bridge club.

It was with a guilty sense of relief that Mrs. Rodger spread her cards on the table for her partner to play. She glanced across the room at another quartet of preoccupied faces, and wondered again whether any of the other players had heard of her husband's death. It was scarcely probable, since her own knowledge of it was purely accidental, and Mr. Selfridge, her informant, lunched down town. This meant that his wife would not hear of it until evening. Once Jennie Selfridge had it, the news would be all of Avondale's—for what it was worth.

Although she had been convinced of her widowhood for the past five years, Mrs. Rodger was forced to admit that there was a certain relief in the definiteness of the banker's information; and yet it had torn her. It had revived dormant memories of tenderness and pain which she dared not show. One could not openly mourn a husband whose desertion of his family had roused public indignation to the boiling point.

Not that she had courted her neighbors' partisanship, or their sympathy. Indeed,

her uncomplaining gentleness, her sustained reserve, had been the fount of Avondale's regard. To-morrow, when they heard of her husband's death, and remembered that she had still played her hand, she knew that they would applaud her bravado.

"I passed your Dee on the way over this afternoon, Idele."

Mrs. Day tossed it across the cards that she was shuffling. Mrs. Rodger replied politely:

"You did?"

"In Thurston Steele's car. They were headed out Elm Road way."

Mrs. Rodger gathered up her cards. Dee with Thurston Steele again! Leila Carfax leveled a glance of reproach at Mrs. Day.

"They're a fascinating combination, the Steele boy and that new car of his," she said lightly. "I saw him pick up your Luella and her dog at the club the other day."

Mrs. Day's eyes narrowed, and her cheeks went red.

"Well, I don't think he's likely to do it again," she said grimly. "Mr. Day saw to that!"

Mrs. Rodger sorted her cards. True, the improprieties of the younger set were a common enough subject, and doubtless Mrs. Day's mention of her husband was innocent enough, but Mrs. Rodger's color deepened.

"I don't believe there's any real harm in young Steele," little Mrs. Hulse ventured mildly, "except that he likes pretty girls."

"He has an eye for beauty," Leila Carfax agreed, thereby drawing a subtle comparison between Mrs. Day's mousy Luella and the popular Dee.

Mrs. Rodger's eyes warmed, but a heavy

sense of futility had settled upon her. What was it she lacked that these other mothers possessed? She knew that the subdued Luella Day would not repeat the offense of being seen again with young Steele; yet of what avail had her admonitions to her own daughter been?

The incident served to bring the girls back to her mind again. She had shrunk, since that inadvertent meeting with Mr. Selfridge, from telling them of their father's death. She shrank now from the thought of their young disdain—or, what would be worse, their indifference. He had become a name to them—an inglorious name. If they recalled him at all, it was with contempt—the ready contempt of youth for an elder's shortcomings. Still, he was their father, and they would have to be told.

"That's decent of you, to trump my trick!" Leila Carfax said dryly. "Where were you, anyway?"

She smiled good-naturedly enough when they handed her the booby prize, an ivory teething ring tied with a pink bow.

"To add to my collection," she told them. "Next week, since it's my day, I shall have a chance to mark the cards!"

Miss Carfax walked as far as Oak Street with her. The leaves of trees and shrubs were riotous with autumn color, and the air was spicy with the scent of dahlias and chrysanthemums.

"You were sweet to take Dee's part, Leila," she said, as they stood for a moment at the crossing. "It's quite true she has been playing around, as she calls it, with the Steele boy. For some reason, I've been unable to cope with that particular problem."

"My dear, I wonder, these days, that a mother's able to cope with any problem." She laughed lightly. "I never thought I'd live to rejoice over my single state, but I do thank Heaven I'm not a mother! It seems to me that in this era one has to be everything from a Madonna to a fishwife, with a lot of things in between."

Mrs. Rodger smiled.

"It's not easy," she admitted. "Still, Dee has been very naughty, and Joey's getting out of hand, too."

"Well, I shouldn't worry—especially over anything that Carol Day says. Poor little Luella has always been jealous of Dee's beaux. There's Bob Hatchett, for example. By the way, I had always thought that he and Dee—"

"Yes, I thought so, too," Mrs. Rodger said, and lifted her shoulders in a gesture of whimsical despair; "but it seems he's too good and too slow, according to my exacting daughter."

"One must be a trifle wicked, these days, to impress our young people, I gather," Leila laughed.

Mrs. Rodger, however, was not laughing as she went on down the street alone. There were weights at her heels as she turned in under the arched gateway that gave on her own broad lawns and pretty flower beds.

Neither Dee nor Joey had come in, the plump maid told her. She climbed the stairs to her own room and threw her hat and gloves on the bed. It seemed to her, as she smoothed her hair before the mirror, that all the futility of her life had been marshaled for her inspection that afternoon—her futility, first as a wife, and then as a mother.

She began to pace the floor with quick, nervous steps, and her mouth was bitter. All afternoon she had looked forward to these few moments before dinner, when, alone, she might unleash her memories and perform her secret rites for her dead, with none to scoff; but her living had cheated her dead. Even in this, her hour of bereavement, they had crowded him out—Dee, so dangerously lovely, so avid of life, so impatient of restrictions; Joey with her pert, freckled face and hard little brown fists, already, at seventeen, a devotee of Freud and Heaven knew what revolutionary cults. Determined young sophisticates, both of them, gradually slipping the leash of her authority; and there was none to share the responsibility.

She stopped suddenly, staring unseeingly before her. *There*, perhaps, was the key to their mutiny. The reticence that had saved her from the open sympathy of her friends had not been sufficient protection from her daughters' secret contempt for her long semi-widowhood. Of late she had sensed it, fellow to the scorn in which they held their father. With an instinct sharpened by her pain, she knew that they had come to blame her, partly, for their fatherless estate; that she was, judged by the relentless standards of the newer youth, a failure.

The panting of a motor in the driveway, and Dee's tinkling laugh, sent her out into the hall. She stood there waiting until she

heard the front door close. Then she heard Joey's voice mingled with Dee's.

"I want to speak with you, Dee," she said. "Will you come up to my room? No, Joey, not you. Run along and dress for dinner—you're late!"

"Well, you know I'm cramming Latin," Joey pouted evasively.

Dee strolled past her mother, loosening her furs, and flung herself into a chair. Mrs. Rodger followed, and closed the door.

"How did you happen to bring Joey home with you? Was she at school?"

"No—we picked her up down on Main."

"On Main Street! Where?"

"Oh, she was having a soda with some other kids."

"And you let her get in Thurston Steele's car?"

"Why not?" demanded Dee irritably. "Thirsty doesn't eat kids—he's a strict vegetarian."

"Idle!"

The girl dropped her eyes and fiddled petulantly with her purse. She seemed to have caught and held all the scents and colors of the autumn afternoon. Her cheeks were nipped to crimson, her brown eyes aglow; but her vivid beauty did not serve to soften her mother's gaze.

"You're talking to your mother, my dear!"

"Oh, well, I know what's coming! I've been out in Thirsty's car again."

"After all I've said?"

"I never said I wouldn't go out with him."

"But you know what he is, and what people say of him."

"Yes, I know what they say of anybody who doesn't walk their particular chalk line," the girl flared hotly. "It's enough to drive a person to the devil! Just because Thirsty has enough money so he doesn't have to grub for a living, he's a 'bad influence'!"

"You know that isn't true, Dee. I've been very tolerant—"

"Huh!" broke in Dee, and flung herself across the room to the window.

"But his reputation is very unsavory, and you know it."

"Oh, it makes me sick—you all make me sick!" she cried savagely. "Judging people by standards that are as out of date as bustles! You don't seem to realize that the world's turned over a few times since you were a girl, mother!"

"Human nature hasn't changed," Mrs. Rodger said quietly; "and, as I just told you, I've been very tolerant of your admirers, Dee. There was Bob Hatchett—"

"Oh, damn!"

"Dee!"

"Well, Bob Hatchett! He might as well be up in the attic among the rest of the relics, for all he knows about *life*." She doubled her small fists fiercely. "I want to *live*, and this whole darned town is dead. It's—it's stagnant. It doesn't know what life is! I'd rather be just plain bad, and *live* and *feel* and know things, than shut up like a darned silly turtle without any emotions!"

Mrs. Rodger's hands closed. She could feel her nails digging into the palms. Her sense of ineffectuality deepened. What could she say to combat that terrible young outburst? If only Harry—

"Speaking of life," she said, and the girl's brows lifted suspiciously at her mother's voice, "I have just had news of your father."

"Of father! Then he's alive?"

"He is dead."

"Oh!" The young voice was hard. "How do you know?"

"From Mr. Selfridge. He has verified the rumor that we heard more than a year ago. Of course we—I have known all along that he must be." Her voice faltered and grew cold again. "But now we know definitely. The details don't really matter—"

"It doesn't matter anyhow, so far as I can see," Dee said, and then impulsively laid a hand on her mother's arm. Mrs. Rodger marveled that the light touch should make her shrink. "I don't mean exactly that, mum; but well, a man—a man who—"

"Yes, I know how you feel," Mrs. Rodger told her daughter, and drew her arm away; "and yet a moment ago, my dear, you were criticizing *my* intolerance."

The girl's smooth cheeks flushed. The strained silence that followed was broken by the peal of the doorbell. Immensely relieved, Dee went out to hang over the balustrade.

"It's Mr. Selfridge," she told her mother over her shoulder, "asking for you."

Mrs. Rodger went down, conscious that Dee was sauntering after her. Mr. Selfridge was standing just inside the library

door. He was a genial, pompous little man, president of Avondale's leading bank.

"I thought I'd better drop in on my way home," he said. "There's a little matter, now that Harry is—now that we are certain—"

The banker coughed uncomfortably behind a plump hand. Mrs. Rodger nodded gravely.

"Your husband's safe-deposit box—"

"Safe-deposit box!" she echoed. "I had no idea—"

"He took it some time before he left," the banker explained, "and paid three years' rental in advance. After that I took the liberty of—er—keeping up the payments, and—"

"That was kind of you," Mrs. Rodger said mechanically.

He waved her thanks aside with a nonchalant gesture of his plump hand.

"Nothing at all—a small matter. I was glad to be able to do it. I only mention it because now, since we have had authentic news of—er—of his death, the contents of the box automatically become yours."

"I see," she said thoughtfully; "though I can't imagine—"

She caught herself up sharply. Mr. Selfridge looked away. Harry Rodger's blithe improvidence had been no secret in Avondale.

"I thought you'd better know about it as soon as possible," the banker said casually. "It's best to get these things straightened out promptly. If you'll come in to see us one of these days—"

"I will," she said; "and thank you—for everything!"

"No thanks needed," he said cordially, and went to the door, where he turned with his hand on the knob. "By the way, when you do come in, if you'll bring along your wedding certificate it will make things a bit simpler."

"My wedding certificate?" she repeated wonderingly.

"You see, the box is in Harry's name," he explained. "As his wife, the contents become yours at his death, but the law requires some proof." He smiled reassuringly. "It's just a legal formality, you know."

She nodded and thanked him again. When he had gone, Dee said witheringly:

"Pompous little turtle, with his 'legal formalities'!" Then, with a gleam of scorn in her eyes: "What did dad want of

a safe-deposit box, I'd like to know? What do you suppose is in it, anyway? A legacy?"

"I can't imagine, my dear," Mrs. Rodger said, too preoccupied to resent the contempt in the girl's voice. "Some things he treasured, no doubt."

"Huh!" Dee said noncommittally, and went upstairs, humming.

II

"WELL, I'm glad he's had the decency to die at last," was Mrs. Selfridge's comment at dinner that evening.

"He probably had no choice in the matter, my dear," her husband reminded her dryly, and sighed. "I always rather liked Hal Rodger, poor devil!"

"Poor nothing!" his wife sniffed. "If his wife had had any spirit, she would have divorced him long ago—leaving her like that with those two young girls to bring up! It's lucky he didn't run through *all* her money."

"Well, he didn't—and perhaps he's left her something, besides."

"*He!* You don't mean he left a will?"

"She may find one when she opens his safe-deposit box."

"Do you mean to say Harry Rodger had a safe-deposit box?"

"Perhaps I didn't *mean* to say anything about it, my dear," Mr. Selfridge confessed, remembering his own largesse in the matter with a pang of guilt, "but he had a box, certainly."

"How utterly absurd, when everybody knows it was *her* money that kept him going!" Mrs. Selfridge wagged her head scornfully. "It's been hard to have any respect for her, the way she's acted—so absolutely spineless; still, I *am* sorry for her."

"Which is something," her husband conceded quietly.

But on the whole, the news of the delinquent Harry Rodger's death caused little stir in the town. The widow was generally liked, despite an innate reserve that had warded off many intimacies. Her position in Avondale had been secure before her husband's desertion; and her graciousness, her delightful dinners, and her generous charities had kept her social footing intact.

Dee and Joey, with youth's unconscious cruelty, considered the news in the light of a providential boon.

"At least we can say our father's dead, now, when any one asks," remarked the latter.

Joey was a bookworm, and would enter college next year—a course which the fun loving Dee had spurned.

"Think I want to learn life out of a lot of dusty old books?" she had scoffed.

"Maybe you think you can learn it in a dead little town like this," had been Joey's retort.

However, despite the difference in their ages and natures, they were one on the larger issues. They concurred in the opinion that a dead parent was more of an asset than one who was alive and yet a total loss, as Joey expressed it.

"I can't see why mother's so cut up, when she's practically known it all this time," Dee said. "I ran into her coming down the attic stairs to-day, and she looked—well, her eyes were red."

"I heard her mooching around up there," Joey remembered, "poking through some old junk."

"I guess she was looking for her what-d'you-call-it—the wedding certificate that old Stuffie Selfridge told her he wanted to see."

But there were too many weighty matters to be considered for the girls to dwell long on this. The annual Country Club ball and regatta was in the offing, and this year, for the first time, Joey was to be permitted to go.

"And a good thing!" Dee had rejoiced. "You can take Bob Hatchett off my hands. I've promised Thirsty I'd let him bring me home."

Mrs. Rodger was secretly grateful for their indifference, which was much easier to bear than their scorn.

It was a week after Mr. Selfridge had verified the news of her husband's death that she passed him again on Main Street.

"I thought you were going to make us a call," he said genially, and noticed how grief had drawn in her cheeks and saddened her eyes.

"I—I should have come before this," she told him, fingering her purse nervously; "only I haven't been able to find my wedding certificate. I can't think where it has gone."

"Well, don't bother about it, then," he advised her. "Anything else of that nature will do—a line from the minister who

married you, or from an attendant or a guest at the wedding. Some small proof that will satisfy the legal conscience is all that is required."

"But—but even that will be difficult to get," she said. "You see, I was married in England, and the curate who officiated went out to India years ago."

"Well, a note from one of your guests, perhaps."

"But I had no wedding. I—I eloped." She colored slightly. "Of course there were witnesses—their names were on the certificate—but I didn't know them."

"Papers like that—wedding certificates, that sort of thing—have a way of disappearing," he said, and laughed. "I'd hate to have to lay my hands on mine in a hurry."

She smiled at that, and turned to go.

"It's too bad that you should be bothered, Mr. Selfridge," she apologized. "I—I scarcely think there's anything of value in the box, but I'll make another hunt for the certificate."

"Oh it'll turn up, all right," the banker prophesied lightly.

But the missing wedding certificate failed to turn up. A few nights later Mr. Selfridge commented on it at dinner.

"I told her I should hate to have to lay my hands on ours," he smiled.

"Well, I could," his wife told him crisply. "It's in the bottom drawer of my desk, just where I put it when we came back from our honeymoon. I can't imagine people being careless about important papers like that."

"You are an exceptionally methodical woman, my dear."

"H-m! What does she have to find it for, anyway?"

"I can't let her open her husband's safe-deposit box without it."

"Well, there's probably nothing there worth bothering about."

"That's what Mrs. Rodger said."

"She did?" Mr. Selfridge saw nothing significant in his wife's comment. His mind had drifted into other channels. Being a man, he could not know that a lack of curiosity in a woman is a darker crime than a lack of spirit. "Do you mean to tell me that she isn't interested enough in that box to make a hunt for her wedding certificate?"

"But she has searched, and isn't able to find it."

"And suppose she doesn't find it at all—what happens then?"

"It becomes a matter for her attorney and the bank officials. Of course the box will be opened ultimately, and if there's anything there that is obviously hers I expect she'll get it."

He reached absently for his coffee. A discreet silence, born of the maid's presence, ensued. Mrs. Selfridge's thoughts were hovering about Mrs. Rodger, whose recent adoption of mourning had seemed to accentuate the faint mist of romance that her domestic tragedy had lent her. When the pantry door had closed on the maid, she looked across at her husband with a humorous lift of brows.

"Maybe there isn't any to turn up, Sel."

"Isn't any what to turn up?"

"Wedding certificate."

He jerked off his glasses, the better to level his disapproval.

"Really, Jennie!"

She colored under his shocked gaze.

"Where's your sense of humor?" she demanded crisply. "I was only joking, of course."

"A most indelicate joke," he said sternly. "A woman like Idele Rodger!"

It had been nothing graver than an impish impulse on Mrs. Selfridge's part. She was a woman of austere principles. If her husband had laughed with her, the suggestion would have evaporated with their mirth. If he had taken it seriously, and showed an inclination to agree with her, she would have allied herself belligerently with Mrs. Rodger. He did neither of these things, and there is a subtle contrariety, born of wedlock, that is almost part of the ceremony. In a resourceful wife, it can readily serve as the basis for quite a domestic furor.

Besides, Mr. Selfridge's ready tribute—"A woman like Idele Rodger"—smacked of furtive admiration. It had the effect of acidulating his wife's little pleasantry. She echoed the phrase:

"A woman like Idele Rodger! That sounds very knowing, my dear! As a matter of fact, unless you've been more fortunate than the rest of us, you know very little about her. When you really stop to think about it—"

For the first time, Mrs. Selfridge did that very thing—stopped to think about it. She recalled the advent of the Rodger family

in Avondale with their two small girls, and their vague references to a residence in London and, later, in New York. She recalled the dashing, handsome, irresponsible Harry Rodger; his ultimate departure for Chicago, whence he had never returned; his wife's uncomplaining submission to her virtual widowhood; the scandal that never quite became a scandal, owing to Mrs. Rodger's cold reserve.

The result of this brief summary was a little alarming. Mrs. Selfridge had a vague sense of having opened some evil Pandora's box. She would have liked to pursue the subject, if only to absolve the widow and relieve an overburdened conscience; but a furtive glance at her husband's preoccupied face kept her silent. After all, the whole thing was absurd and horrid.

But for the appearance of the Days—father, mother, and the subdued Luella—who dropped in after dinner for a rubber; but for the warm affinity that existed between Mrs. Day and Mrs. Selfridge, the matter might have ended there. It was Carol Day who revived the subject.

"Well, death has done for her what she wouldn't do for herself."

"Exactly what I was saying to Sel at dinner," Mrs. Selfridge remembered. The two women were in the kitchen, rummaging in the cake box for a snack. "He was certainly a worthless sort—though you notice she's never admitted it." She gave a little deprecating laugh. "I told Sel that he may have left her a legacy in the safe-deposit box he rented before he left."

"Safe-deposit box!" echoed Mrs. Day incredulously.

"Why, yes!"

The opportunity was irresistible. Two minutes later the whole story of the safe-deposit box, the missing certificate, and Mrs. Selfridge's daring witticism was Mrs. Day's. Mrs. Selfridge was flushing.

"Of course it was wicked of me; but, after all, as I said to Sel, what *do* we really know about her?"

Mrs. Day, stacking delectable spires of sliced cake on a plate, was looking into space with her mouth open.

"My dear!" she breathed.

Her eyes found Mrs. Selfridge's and clung in awful conjecture.

"She's always been so terribly conservative—secretive, you might call it," said Mrs. Selfridge a little defiantly.

"S-sh! I think Luella's in the butler's pantry," cautioned Mrs. Day, in a nervous whisper.

Luella was in the butler's pantry, taking down the cake plates that she had been sent for. When she brought them into the kitchen, her pale cheeks were unnaturally red, but her blue eyes were bland and guileless.

III

THERE had been no malice behind Mrs. Selfridge's sly inference. Born of an impulse, it was repeated in a spirit of daring bravado. Mrs. Day retailed it in a playful whisper. Oddly enough, the repetition lent it a substantiality from which she drew back, frightened; but there is an astonishing tenacity of life in the feeblest scandal. It was a fact that once the naughty jest had been shelved, it began to generate life like an egg in an incubator.

It was Luella, prompted by the ruthless hostilities of youth, who released the embryo scandal, now nicely mature.

The dance at the Country Club was proving the liveliest and gayest of the season. Dee Rodger, her cheeks and lips as vivid as the poppy petal dress she wore, was on the floor with Thurston Steele. Beneath the blithe shrill of young voices, the whisper of slippered feet, the syncopated rhythm of the orchestra, lurked the hopeless jealousies and heartburnings of youth. Bob Hatchett, from his sheltered little *cul de sac* off the ballroom, was watching the luminous Dee bestow her favors on his rival, and tearing a palm leaf into shreds. Luella Day dawdled idly with her fan, and pretended interest in the weighty remarks of a bespectacled young man, while her eyes searched furtively for the missing Bob. Would he remember that the next dance was his, or would he come blundering up with apologies after the encore, as he had done once before to-night?

But Bob, with that *faux pas* fresh in his mind, was before her at the first bars of the next fox trot, and Luella's cheeks grew hot as he took her into his arms. Dee was on the floor again, this time with a pale-haired youth who kept her only until the encore, when young Steele cut in recklessly and whirled her off.

Luella was conscious of the arms about her tensing, and her lips grew tight.

"You can't say Thurston Steele lacks nerve," she said, and laughed.

Bob made an inarticulate sound in his throat. Luella was faint with chagrin. Little shivers were running up her spine into the very roots of her close-cropped hair.

"Oh, come along—let's sit the rest of this out," she suggested lightly, and felt the agony it cost Bob to leave Dee there on the floor.

She led him out to the broad piazza. A yellow moon hung over the evergreens on the lawn. Other couples strolled past them, speaking in the subdued voice of love, and there were blurs of white frocks and shirt fronts among the dark shrubs. Luella launched a vivacious monologue—the dance, the music, the shortcomings of mutual enemies, anything to hold Bob there at her side; but, even with her arm locked hard in his, she knew that he was not there. Dee had him!

"Seen Thurston Steele's new car?" she asked abruptly.

"Guess every one has," Bob replied grimly.

"Including Dee Rodger," she laughed, and waited breathlessly for her companion's retort.

"Well, I guess it's a good car," he said at last.

Her nostrils quivered.

"At least it has a better reputation than Thirsty," she said, and laughed again. "I expect poor Dee—well, I suppose I'd better not say it."

She felt Bob's eyes on her, and dropped her head in pretended confusion. Her heart was pumping hard.

"Say what?" he demanded quietly.

"W-well, I was going to say that I suppose, now, Dee can't be too finical about her friends."

"What do you mean by that, Lou?"

She began to twist her handkerchief.

"Oh, you know well enough what everybody's saying!"

"About Dee?"

The swift belligerence in his voice was salt on her wound. She tossed her head.

"Well, not exactly about Dee. Don't try to pretend you haven't heard, Bob! Why, everybody—"

"Well, I haven't heard anything," he insisted huskily. "I'd like to—what is it, anyway?"

"Good gracious, don't be so fierce! It isn't my fault!"

"What isn't your fault?"

"That her mother was never married to her father!"

IV

PERHAPS the most blithely contented young person at the dance that night was Joey. She was immune to amatory barbs. As an avowed intellectualist, her interests were concerned with the affairs of the world rather than those of the heart. With a group of her contemporaries, she was squatting on the stairs, eating pale green ice cream and discussing some of the weightier problems of life, when Dee summoned her from the dressing room doorway. Joey got up sulkily.

"What's up?" she demanded.

"Joey, get your things. We're going now."

"Where's the fire?" Joey wanted to know, but her eyes sobered as they met Dee's. "Who's going along?"

"Nobody. Hurry, will you?"

Joey obeyed silently. They slipped out of the side door and took one of the taxis parked among the private cars. As they swung out of the driveway, Joey turned to her sister.

"What's the row? Mother isn't sick or anything, is she?"

"Joey!" Dee's hand closed tightly on her sister's hard little paw. "Joey, something awful has happened."

There was no mistaking the gravity of that chilled little voice. In spite of herself, Joey began to tremble.

"Wh-what's happened?" she demanded.

"Joey, I—I just heard that little fiend, that Day cat—oh, Joey, did it ever occur to you that—that—"

"That what?"

Joey was panting. Dee began to weep.

"That—that mother mightn't ever have been married to dad at all?"

"Mightn't—wh-what *are* you talking about?" Dee's tears had lent the younger girl courage. "Dee, you've gone off your nut!"

"That's what she said! Thirsty and I went out on the porch for a breath of air. She was standing there with Bob, and she said—she said everybody was saying—"

"And you let her get away with it?" flared Joey shrilly.

Dee whirled on her.

"What could I— Oh, Joe, don't you see? It came to me like a flash that—that it might be—"

"You don't mean to say you *believe* it?" expostulated Joey, in what she had intended to be an indignant voice; but it was, in fact, scarcely more than a whisper.

"Why, I don't know—that's just it!"

Dee's eyes were dry now. "When you stop to think about dad, and the way he acted, and mother always being so—so silent about him, and—"

"Well, we never encouraged her to talk about him," broke in Joey ruefully.

"I know, but you remember how Mr. Selfridge told her she would have to have her wedding certificate to open the safe-deposit box, and how she said she couldn't—oh, Joey dear, Lou Day wouldn't have dared say it if—"

Dee's voice trailed off. She was rolling her handkerchief into a damp little ball. The stupendous awfulness of it took away their breath. Their young faces were cut in white terror against the dark upholstery of the cab.

It was the intrepid Joey who broke the silence.

"Dee! How—how marvelous! How splendidly heroic of her!"

"Heroic?" echoed Dee.

"To think that she should have had the courage! That all these years she's been keeping *that*! Think of mother—"

"Mother, of all people!" Dee panted.

"That's the wonder of it. When *we* thought she was—"

"A mid-Victorian stoic," finished Dee.

Joey had suddenly become very cool, very logical.

"It's a wonder to me that it never occurred to us before," she said. "When you stop to put everything together—"

Conjectures came thick and fast. From humiliation and anger they passed through intervening stages of wonderment and awe to intense excitement, gathering maturity along the way. Like Aladdin's lamp that had gathered dust in obscurity with none to recognize its magic, a glorious martyrdom had concealed itself within the commonplace shell of their own mother. Commonplace, indeed! They had scorned the dull atmosphere of Avondale, yet here, in the stagnant little village—in their own house—was a piece torn out of the very heart of life itself.

There were no more words between them until they had let themselves into the hall and heard their mother's voice coming down the stairs.

"Is that you, girls?" said Mrs. Rodger.

They exchanged a swift, guilty glance. Involuntarily they clasped hands for support. Then Dee said tremulously:

"Yes, mother."

"You're early, aren't you?"

"Y-yes," mumbled Dee.

"Have a good time?"

"Yes, thanks."

"That's nice! Good night, dears."

They tiptoed up the stairs. Joey followed Dee into her bedroom and closed the door behind her. They stood gazing at each other, pale, wide-eyed, their airy sophistication quite gone. After a moment, Joey said softly:

"Think of all she's been through, Dee!"

"And what she must have suffered!"

Dee appended.

"When he left her," Joey reminded her sister, "it must have been terrible. I wonder why he did!"

"Somehow they do," Dee said sadly, "when they're not really tied."

"Perhaps it was something like George Eliot," suggested Joey dreamily. "They couldn't m-marry, you know, because of the English law, and mother was English."

Dee nodded.

"History's just full of such cases," she said. "It's full of love stories—*real* love stories."

"Somehow I never thought of mother being in love."

"Well, you can now," said Dee.

They sat—Joey hugging her knees on the floor, Dee on the edge of her bed, her evening cape slipping from her slender white shoulders.

"Now that it's out," she said thoughtfully, "what do you suppose will happen?"

"Why, nothing," Joey declared. "You don't think people would—"

"They're Pharisees," Dee said loftily.

"You couldn't expect them to understand the—the grandeur of it."

Joey looked belligerent.

"Just let them try and start anything!" she said, and wagged her shingled head defiantly.

Dee was looking dreamily into space.

"He *was* attractive," she recalled.

"Who? Dad?" Dee nodded. Joey's eyes glowed. "Was he, really? Was he handsome, Dee?"

"Very," Dee said. She got up so suddenly that her cape slipped to the floor and lay there, cuddling her ankles. "Joey, I

hadn't thought of it before! Do you know, this—this thing makes *us*—you and me—illegitimate!"

Joey lifted her pert little face. It seemed to Dee that every freckle on the snub nose stood out separately as the younger girl got slowly to her feet. It was literally a moment to rise to. As she stood gaping back into Dee's tragic brown eyes, their mother's voice reached them again.

"Aren't you in bed yet, girls?"

Dee went to the door a little unsteadily, and then turned back with a resolute air.

"I'm going in!" she announced.

"Oh—oh, *shall* we?" her sister asked breathlessly.

With their hearts pumping stuffily in their throats they went down the hall.

Their mother's big, pleasant room was softly aglow with the light of fire and lamp. She sat before a desk littered with papers, the desk light gleaming on her soft blue negligee, her brown hair, and her bare white arms. The smile with which she turned to welcome them was a blend of surprise and pleasure.

"We—we weren't sleepy yet," Dee announced lamely.

"You must have come home before the party was over," Mrs. Rodger said.

"We did."

"Weren't you enjoying it?"

"Y-yes, but we thought we'd come home—early. What are *you* doing, mum?"

"Oh, just sorting out some old things—papers and letters. They collect so."

She tore an envelope across, as she spoke, and tossed it into the paper basket. They had sidled across the room to her side. Joey was frankly staring. Dee's curiosity was less open, though her glance swept her mother furtively from head to foot. For the first time in their lives, Mrs. Rodger's daughters were regarding her not as the maternal despot of these later years, nor as an accepted and integral part of their childish memories, but as an individual—a human entity.

When she glanced up at them with a smile, Dee laid an embarrassed hand on a faded photograph that topped a little pile of papers.

"Who's that, mum?"

"Why, that's your father, dear—taken years ago, when he was young."

"Oh, let's see!" Joey cried, but Dee had the photograph in her hand. "I never saw that before."

"It's been among some old things upstairs," Mrs. Rodger explained casually. "I came across it just the other day."

"Wasn't he attractive, Dee? Without that funny vest, now—"

"Young men quite prided themselves on their waistcoats in those days," their mother told them quietly.

"Was this when you first knew him, mum?"

"Yes, dear."

Joey pounced upon another picture.

"And this?"

Mrs. Rodger laughed gently.

"I thought that hat quite the smartest in all England," she said. "We were on our honeymoon then."

"Mother, you were *sweet*!"

"Just *too* darling!" seconded Joey.

Mrs. Rodger glanced from the faded photograph to their two eager faces. Her own cheeks flushed pink.

"I think I must have looked then very much as you do now, Dee," she said. "I was nineteen—just about your age."

"When you and dad were—when you were—"

Dee swallowed hard, but the word would not come.

Joey's mouth was hanging open, but Mrs. Rodger said calmly:

"When we were married—yes."

"Were you happy, mother?" Dee asked softly, avoiding her sister's awed stare.

"Very," Mrs. Rodger said, and they saw the soft lace at her throat stir as she drew in a quick breath.

Dee was conscious of a sudden lump that impeded speech, but Joey whispered:

"Did you love him, mother—I mean awfully, *madly*—so that nothing else in the world mattered?"

"That's the way real love is, Joey dear," Mrs. Rodger said.

"But your parents didn't like him," Dee broke in.

This fact was part of the family history. It had assumed a new significance now.

"Didn't approve of him," corrected Mrs. Rodger, her eyes on the photograph that she had lain down. "He was an American, you see, and my father was a clergyman and very strict. Your father was too worldly and dashing for his taste."

"What was he doing in England, mother?"

"Your father? Selling something, I believe—something that nobody wanted, evi-

dently." A smile tugged at her lips—an indulgent little grin. "At least, his business there wasn't successful."

"But you didn't care—about that," Joey said breathlessly. "And your father disowned you?"

"Perhaps not quite that. I defied him, you see."

"You eloped?" Her mother nodded. "And did you ever regret it, mum?"

Mrs. Rodger shook her head slowly, and her voice was very soft and very firm.

"Never, dear."

A swift glance of exultation passed between the two girls. Joey had dropped down on the hearthrug in her favorite position, her brown arms hugging her knees. Dee had perched on the arm of her mother's chair. So imperceptibly had they invaded the secret crypt of her memories, so opportunely had their eager interest coincided with her own reflections, that she was but barely conscious of surprise.

"Tell us about him, mum," urged Dee softly. "Was he a dear, and were you happy together?"

"He was just that, Dee—a dear." Her voice faltered. "Yes, we were very happy."

"Then—then, why—"

Mrs. Rodger looked up into her elder daughter's flushed face. She said gravely:

"It isn't enough, in this world and in this country, just being dear and lovable and kind. You see, the money was mine, and after a time it grew to gall your father that this was so. He was a great dreamer, and he was sensitive, as all dreamers are. He grew to think of himself as a failure, I think; and so he went off, like the young man in the story, to make his fortune." She clasped her hands in her lap and looked down at them thoughtfully. "But he wasn't young, you see—not young enough; and it isn't easy to make one's fortune these days. He didn't come back. That's *why*, Dee."

Silence settled on the pleasant room. Joey reached out and laid a hand on her mother's skirt.

"But why—why did you let him go, mother? Couldn't you have kept him?"

"No, dear," replied Mrs. Rodger, and her voice was quite dead. "I couldn't have kept him, even if I had wanted to."

"But he should have known," Dee said, "how hard it would be for you—what people would say!"

"He expected to come back, you see," her mother said quickly; "and he didn't know how hard it would be for me. As for what people would say—he would have scorned them. He was always impatient of conventions." She smiled a little wistfully at Dee. "You're a bit like him in that, dear, but you mustn't cultivate it. After all, it's better to stick to the beaten path if you want to be truly happy."

The little china clock on the mantel was striking one when they left her. It was like coming from some moving drama in a theater. Joey followed Dee into the older girl's room, and they stood at gaze for a moment, their eyes wide with awe and wonderment.

"You see!" Joey whispered exultantly.

"Y-yes, Joey, I saw," Dee faltered.

"It's just like a—like a marvelous love story!" breathed Joey, and tiptoed to bed in a daze.

But Dee crept shivering into bed and lay there staring into the darkness. Here indeed were romance, fidelity, the illusive glamour of heroic martyrdom, life lived to the full by one whom she had thought impervious to its touch. As Joey had pointed out, it was magnificent. It sort of set one apart from the world, freed one from all the galling conventions that made life commonplace and dull; but it made one feel very much alone, too, and a little chilly and frightened.

V

THE days that followed the dance and the sensational discovery were days of breathless readjustment for Mrs. Rodger's daughters. After that midnight conference in their mother's room, they had reached the tacit agreement that she must not know that they had learned her secret. They must do their utmost to preserve the fiction that she had so valiantly established. It was a terrible and a splendid responsibility—one that altered the entire face of the world.

At first the forthright Joey had inclined toward a heroic attitude to express her contempt of public opinion; but, however widespread the rumor of Mrs. Rodger's disgrace, and whatever the town thought, Avondale did not materially alter its comportment toward the widow, and heroics seemed a little out of order. The conservative little bridge club gathered at her house on the regular day, with Joey belligerently

counting noses from an upper window. Their own small coterie of intimates was not less friendly. As a consequence, their new motion of allegiance manifested itself in a doglike attendance on their mother, to the exclusion of the momentous trivialities that had hitherto filled their days.

Unconscious as she was of the cause, it gradually bore in upon Mrs. Rodger that the millennium had come to pass. She had reclaimed her babies. All that her gentle homilies, her persistent tolerance, her harshest severity had been unable to do, had been accomplished by some force as mysterious as it was miraculous. Gone were their covert antagonism, their ready defiance, their sullen resentment. In place of these there was a respectful tenderness which they had not shown her since their pigtail days, together with a camaraderie that was delightful.

She had the rare good sense to make no comment on the change.

"They've matured overnight," she decided happily, and made a secret oblation to the generous deity who had worked the miracle.

It was Joey, on the alert for the slightest word or gesture that could be interpreted as condemnation, who mentioned Bob Hatchett.

"We can't jump on him for not keeping off *our* grass lately," she said, with a side-wise glance at her sister. "Think he's cooled off?"

Dee's cheeks went crimson, and her pretty mouth drew down at the corners in a sneer.

"I hadn't thought about it," she said coldly.

"Well, I have, and I certainly never thought he'd believe it—specially from Lou Day."

"Why shouldn't he believe it? He knows she'd never dare say it on her own responsibility. Besides, it's true, isn't it?"

"Just the same," Joey scolded, "the chivalrous thing, for a *man*, is to pretend he doesn't believe it. I never thought Bob was a cad!"

"He's *good*, my dear," Dee reminded her, and shrugged. "He comes from the clan that once hanged witches and branded unfortunate women." She smiled a little tremulously. "You notice there hasn't been any cooling off on the part of Thirsty Steele. He's phoned me every day this week."

"Well, how do you know he's heard?"

"He was with me when I heard, wasn't he? But Thirsty doesn't pretend to be good!"

She said it scornfully, with her head high. She was a sober and thoughtful Dee these days. Joey was a little in awe of her.

"I notice you haven't been playing around with him any more."

"Because I haven't been playing around with any one," returned Dee, and painstakingly folded her handkerchief. "I—I haven't felt much like playing around or—or seeing any one lately, Joey. It seemed to me we ought to stick pretty close to mother."

But she went to walk alone that afternoon, and a mile from home Thurston Steele's roadster overtook her.

"Well, if it isn't Cousin Annie all the way from Peru!" he greeted her cheerily, and flung open the car door. "How are all the folks? Why, you haven't changed a bit in all these years!"

She found herself laughing almost hysterically—he was so gay, so full of airy nonsense, though.

Secretly she had never truly liked him. His attraction for her had been the irresistible lure of forbidden fruit. Now, however, she climbed in beside him with a warm glow of gratitude. What did it matter that Bob—faithful as a humble puppy since their high school days—had failed her? She smiled warmly up into young Steele's handsome, ardent face.

"I can't go far," she told him. "I must get home early."

"Early!" he echoed. "Never heard the word before. What's it mean?"

She tried to laugh as lightly as she might have done a month ago—to be as blithely inconsequential; but a month ago her blasé insouciance had been a pose. Now she need no longer pretend a knowledge of life.

Thurston was regarding her furtively out of the tail of his eye. This was a different girl than the Dee he had known. Her arch smile had been replaced by a preoccupied tenderness, and her brown eyes were misty. She seemed softer, somehow, more of a child, and infinitely more alluring.

When they reached a deserted stretch of woody road, he stopped the car and laid an arm across the seat behind her.

"Not mad with poor Thirsty, are you, Dee?" he inquired with a comical air of dejection.

"Of course I'm not," she smiled.

"Don't be silly!"

"Then why have you been so upstage with me?"

"I—oh, I've been busy, Thirsty," she temporized.

"Another new word!" he said, and became suddenly grave. "Look here, Dee—I've been wanting to see you ever since you gave me the air at the dance the other night."

She flushed and caught her lip between her teeth.

"I'm sorry about that, but I—I couldn't help it. I had to go."

"Of course you did," he agreed gently. "Don't you suppose I understood, child?"

Her gaze was on the autumn-decked trees, ablaze in the late afternoon sun. His arm slipped to her shoulders and drew her closer to him. She felt his breath on her cheek.

"Look here, Dee—it's no good my pretending I didn't hear the other night. You must have known I did." She nodded silently. "Is that why you've been avoiding me? Is it, Dee? You didn't think it would make any difference to me, did you?"

The warm ardor of his voice brought a lump into her throat, but she said, with her cheeks burning:

"Thank you, but I don't want your sympathy, Thirsty."

"So that's it!" he said, and laughed softly. "Been sensitive, have you? As if you didn't know me better than that! Why, you remember, just the other night, we were talking—"

"Y—yes, yes," she broke in quickly, the memory of those daring discussions flooding back; "but that was before I— but then I—"

"You're a nice one," he scoffed, "going back on your principles like this! Why only the other night, you were saying—"

"I know, Thirsty," she cut him off again, trying desperately to recapture something of the old assurance with which she had once disposed of moral codes and shopworn tenets; "but you forget that here in Avondale—"

"Scared of a lot of old mossbacks!" he teased. "What do you care what they say? Real people—people who know life—don't give a darn for a little thing like that any more. You know that. Now, show a little spunk!"

She saw that there was no doubt in his mind as to the truth of the story. She saw, too, that he was trying to comfort her. He had implied that the hated "mossbacks" had not been silent, and he was trying to let her see that he had allied himself with her. Her heart warmed to him. Something of her old bravado crept back.

"Why, you ought to be glad," he was saying softly. "You know how browbeaten and bullied you've been. Now you can assert yourself, and she won't have any comeback. Dee, listen—I love you! You know I've always loved you!"

His lips were on hers before she realized the full significance of what he had said. Her thoughts were spinning around like the yellow leaves all about them, and it was without coherent thought that she fought him until his hold on her relaxed in sheer amazement.

"Why, you little wild cat!" he panted. His hat was off, his face was white and a little blank. "Say, listen!"

"How dare you say those things to me? How dare you insinuate—"

"Insinuate nothing!" he broke in, and his lips were pale with anger. "Be yourself, Dee! I didn't say a thing I haven't heard you say yourself."

"I never said I was browbeaten or bullied!"

Her face was burning, her eyes ablaze. She opened the car door, but his arm shot out and caught her.

"You're lovely when you're angry, Dee! You oughtn't to be sore with me when I've stood by you. That's more than most of 'em will do, as you're likely to find out!" Thurston's voice dropped to a whisper. "Honey, this is our chance to show 'em how little we care what they think. I love you, Dee!"

With the help of her doubled fists and her sharp little heels, she freed herself and sprang from the car. Then she spoke out of the depths of her new-found wisdom.

"You—you don't know what love is!" she panted, and started on a run down the road.

She was aware of a motor chugging behind her, and of Steele's face seen through a blur. He slowed down and leaned out of the car.

"Don't be a fool, Dee! It's four miles and more back to town."

She turned her face away from him and walked steadily on.

Presently there was only a lifting mist of dust where the smart roadster had been. The thinning trees, the rich carpet of yellow leaves stretching away on either side of the road, caught the last rays of the setting sun and reflected an eerie glow. A bleak melancholy settled upon her. There was something wrong with life.

There had been something wrong with life a month before. It had been dull and commonplace, and there had been a splendid grandeur in lawlessness and illicit amours; but that was before she had *known*. If life had been dull a month ago, it was sordid and revolting now. Thurston Steele, to whom she had looked for understanding, had seen in the story of her mother's noble martyrdom only a license for his own advances. Bob, who had protested his love since he had first carried her schoolbooks, had ignored her as if she was poisonous.

As she trudged blindly along, the sun went down behind the naked trees and dusk crept up the hills. A sense of desolation against which she had been fighting for days descended bleakly upon her. The luster of her mother's story was blurred. She knew now that it had been growing steadily dimmer, as she came to realize what that deflection from the beaten path had meant, and what it would come to mean. They would be social outcasts, she and Joey and their mother; but her mother was fortified by her memories, and Joey had her high young courage. Dee had allied herself with them, and she must not abandon them now.

VI

It was quite dark when Dee turned in at her own gate. The muscles in her thighs and calves ached, and her feet, in their high-heeled shoes, were painfully cramped. The lights in the windows were gleaming out upon the lawns and shrubs.

As she went up the porch steps, a tall figure came out of the shadows, and she heard Bob Hatchett's voice.

"That you, Dee?" he said.

Something inside her leaped up like a flame, and her hands clenched.

"Yes, it's I."

"Joey said you ought to be here soon. I've been waiting."

"Yes? What for?"

"Why, for you. You all right? Is anything wrong?"

She stepped quickly out of the panel of light shed by the glassed door.

"Of course I'm all right," she replied sharply. "I've been walking, and I'm tired—that's all. Good night!"

"But say, I've just come!" His voice was playfully reproachful. "I want to see you, Dee—to talk with you."

"Really?" she scoffed. "Well, since you've waited so long, I guess you can wait a little longer."

Once said, she knew that it had hurt Bob, and at once she was furious with him—the more so when his voice came meekly apologetic:

"But—but wait, Dee! I haven't been over before this because I—because you—well, I thought maybe you didn't want to see me."

"Why shouldn't I want to see my friends?" she demanded hotly.

His figure was a big, restless blur in the darkness.

"Don't be cross, Dee!" he pleaded miserably. "I had to come. I couldn't bear it any longer. I hoped you'd be glad to see me, dear!"

She laughed harshly.

"Well, as it happens, I can't—see you. I expect you came over through the meadows so that no one else could see you, didn't you?"

"Why, Dee! What a thing to say!"

His voice was incredulous. He reached out and caught her hand, but she snatched it free.

"Don't pretend! You know why I said it. I was on the porch the other night. I—I heard Lou Day."

"Oh, my dear!" he whispered, and now she could not free her hand from his determined grasp. "You—you heard? But look here, you didn't think I'd believe a thing like that, Dee? You didn't think for a minute I believed it?"

So that was it! Of course he hadn't believed it, or he wouldn't be here. That was why Bob had stayed away—until he could convince himself that it was not true. It was salt on the open wound that young Steele had inflicted.

"No, I don't think you believe it," she said shrilly, "or you wouldn't have risked your reputation coming over here. If you had known it was true—"

To her dismay, her voice broke on a sob, and the next instant his arms were about her.

"Then I'd have been here just the same, Dee! I would know that you needed me all the more, dear; but of course I never for a moment—"

She wrenched herself free and tried desperately to pierce the darkness, so that she could see his face.

"Bob! You—you did believe it? Bobs, tell me—the truth!"

"But I didn't! Of course not! What nonsense!" he blustered indignantly.

"But you did—you do, Bobs! You're just trying to spare me! Tell me! I want to know the truth."

He moved his feet uneasily, coughed, and wagged his head. She could almost see the red confusion of his face, though it was so dark.

"Good Lord, Dee, I—I don't know whether I did or didn't! What difference does it make, anyway, between you and me? I—I tried not—" His voice was heavy with guilt. He drew her to him impulsively. "I love you, Dee darling! I've been afraid you might hear that fool thing. I've been trying to make them take it back, but I—Dee, why, darling!"

For she was sobbing in his arms.

"You—you do believe it, and you c-came just the same!" she whispered.

Bob, feeling singularly like a murderer, held her close.

"Don't, honey girl! Don't cry! What do you care what they say? You've got me, Dee. You're going to marry me—you remember you promised when you were thirteen; and then let 'em dare say a word! If you want me to, I'll go out and lick the whole darned town right now, sweetheart!"

"Bob," Dee said tragically, lifting her wet face to his, "are you sure you want to marry a n-nameless girl?"

"All the better for me," Bob declared stoutly. "You won't be so likely to make fun of the name you're going to get!"

"And, Bob," Dee said after a moment, laying a very hot little cheek against his, "after we're married—you're so respectable, Bobs dear!—they won't dare say a word against my—my family, will they?"

"Let 'em try it!" Bob said menacingly.

VII

THE happy miracle that had taken place in her small family circle quite absorbed Mrs. Rodger these days. Dee's engagement to Bob Hatchett, brazenly announced in the local papers, and copied by

some of the larger ones, was the glorious climax to the miracle. The shadow her husband's death had laid upon her was shot through with light from her new-found happiness in her daughters. There were no more shocking outbursts from Joey. Indeed, the younger girl's devotion to her mother was almost belligerent. As for Dee, she was all tenderness and dewy smiles.

"I thought it might make you happier if I chose the beaten path, dear," she had told her mother softly. "We're going to be terribly respectable, Bob and I!"

That she intended this respectability to be an inviolate panoply about her mother, Mrs. Rodger could not guess.

If Avondale still whispered over its teacups, the widow was unaware of it. If Mr. Selfridge no longer stopped to joke lightly over the missing wedding certificate, she did not notice the omission. If afternoon calls and luncheon invitations occurred less frequently than they had been wont to do, she was too much preoccupied with her plans for Dee's wedding to be aware of it.

The subject of the safe-deposit box did not recur to her until one evening when Dee came back from the telephone in the hall.

"It was Mr. Selfridge asking for you," she announced, "and I took the message."

"Dear me!" Mrs. Rodger said guiltily. "I expect it's about that safe-deposit box of your father's. It quite slipped my mind."

"They're going to open it to-morrow," Dee said. "He said he thought you'd like to know. He *also* said"—here she threw a grim glance at Joey, who had looked up eagerly from her book—"that you might want to be on hand when it was opened."

"Why, of course I do," replied Mrs. Rodger. "Strange that he—did he say what time, dear?"

"At three o'clock to-morrow."

"Well, I must go down, certainly."

"And I'll go with you," Dee announced firmly.

Thus, when Mr. Selfridge came out of his little private office on the following afternoon, to greet the widow, he found Dee ranged beside her mother like some lovely tutelary goddess. His eyes took in the mother's deep mourning and the daughter's radiance before they dropped nervously to the key in his hand. He fingered it uneasily as he spoke.

"I'm very glad you came along, Miss Rodger," he said. "You see, in cases of this kind, where it devolves upon us to open a safe-deposit box, we like to have some relative or relatives of the deceased present, if possible."

He was leading the way down into the chilly crypt of the strong room as he talked, his latent pomposity a little more apparent than usual, his voice lacking its customary geniality. Dee's eyes were on him, hot with scorn, when he let them into the room with its metal walls, and indicated chairs.

"Thanks—I'll stand," she announced coldly, and laid an arm on the back of her mother's chair.

Mrs. Rodger's eyes were on the box which the banker had singled out for the little key he held. She reached up for Dee's hand, and felt its pressure, warm and reassuring. Mr. Selfridge was murmuring something in regard to the pleasant weather, as he drew out the box.

"Now here we are! Let's see—h-m, nothing very much, I'm afraid."

From the depths of the small, coffinlike box his plump hands had drawn two envelopes. He adjusted the glasses that hung on his vest and peered from the envelopes back into the box.

"This is all, I guess. Well, this certainly belongs to you."

Mrs. Rodger reached for the envelope he handed her. Across its face sprawled the words:

To my dear wife.

She began to tear it open feverishly.

"And *this*—" said Mr. Selfridge.

The envelope he still held bore no address. Out of it he had drawn a folded paper, its edges yellowed with age. He spread it open, and his eyes lifted swiftly to find Dee's upon him.

"And *this*," he repeated, and wet his lips—"this belongs to you, too—I guess there's no doubt of that!"

"G—give it to me!" demanded Dee tensely. "Mother, look!"

"See, darling—a love letter!" Mrs. Rodger lifted her eyes from the closely scrawled pages in her hand. "You see what he says!"

The girl's eyes dropped mechanically to the sentences that her mother pointed out:

That I have proved myself unworthy of your love, my beloved, I know, though your blessed loyalty will not admit it; but I cannot bear to

have my children grow up to think of me as a failure. You will make them understand, if I never come back—

"Why, Dee darling!" Mrs. Rodger's eyes wavered between the girl's stricken face and the creased and yellowed paper that she had laid over the letter in her mother's hands. "Don't cry, dear heart! Don't—"

"Mother!" exclaimed Dee, pointing. "Don't you *see*?"

The widow's eyes followed the girl's shaking finger.

"Oh!" she said. "My wedding certificate! So it was here all the time! Your father must have put it here, and—why, Dee darling! My baby—"

Her arms went out and gathered in the sobbing figure of the girl.

"Oh, mother, *mother!*"

Mrs. Rodger held her close, murmuring broken sentences of love and reassurance, but her eyes blended bewilderment with anxiety. Mechanically she shifted the papers in her hand, and, as she did so, her gaze fell on the wedding certificate—on the words "holy matrimony"—and clung there. Then her hold on the girl's slender shoulders tightened, and, when her eyes went back to the bowed head in her lap, a calm exaltation was shining out from their depths.

Mr. Selfridge started to speak. Half a dozen times he had begun a sentence, and with each abortive effort he had edged a little closer to the door. Now that once more he found his lips moving without any resultant sound, he went silently out of the room and left Mrs. Rodger alone with her legacy.

THE HILL OF THE WIND

ON a deepening autumn day
Called the west wind: "Come away!"
Out we went to hark, and heed
Where the wind would lead.

Through the lush green aftermath
Upward wound the pleasant path—
Upward wound, and all along
Sang the wind a song.

Then at last a crowning crest
With tall cedars on its breast,
Where the wind, with shouts of glee,
Bade us turn and see.

Such a vision! Green and gold
Undulant and far outrolled;
Sudden silence seemed to bind
Our lips and the wind.

We were held as by the spell
Of a power inscrutable;
We were awed as by a sense
Of omnipotence.

Silent still we downward went,
Raised and raptured, soul content,
Grateful to the wild wind's will,
And that heavenly hill.

Clinton Scollard

Lolita and the Gringo

THE STORY OF THE RIVAL SUITORS OF THE DANCING GIRL
WHO WAS KNOWN AS LA GOLONDRINA, THE SWALLOW

By Mary Imlay Taylor

SHE was dancing when Gillespie first saw her—dancing the *jarabe*. Singling him out of the crowd in front of the dancers' booth, she raised her delicate finger tips to her ripe red lips and blew him a kiss.

It seems, remembering this detail, that she began it. So did Eve; but it is only fair to remember that Adam was not a good sport, for he laid the blame on her. Men have been doing that ever since. Gillespie? Well, you shall hear.

He touched Don Manuel's arm.

"Who is she—the little dancer in scarlet and purple?" he whispered.

"Oh, that's Lolita—La Golondrina, the swallow, they call her—she's so swift." Don Manuel lit a cigarette. "She's the best dancer in Mexico. She wears out three pairs of slippers in a night, they say."

"Gosh, but she's pretty!" Gillespie muttered, watching her. She had the bloom of a ripe nectarine and the eyes of a wild fawn. "Who's that black-browed beetle she's dancing with now?" he added aloud.

Don Manuel shrugged.

"How should I know? You pay to go in and dance with these girls. Let's get out of this jam—the lottery's running over there. Lolita always draws a mob."

As he spoke, he made his way through the crowd in front of the dancers' booth, thrusting aside Diego, the water carrier—Diego without his pole, dressed in his best *calzones* and a Sunday sash. Gillespie, following his friend, got the black looks intended for the insolent young aristocrat.

"These revolutions have brought all the scum to the surface," Don Manuel growled throatily, waving his Malacca cane at a friend in the street.

It was the January *fiesta* at San Juan—a starless night, but the plaza was aglow

with color, and the little booths, made like boxes with one side open and covered with unbleached cotton, shone with light. Smoking oil lamps lit up the open stands where Indian women squatted, selling their wares. The pecan trees—their brown stems rising out of flares of fire, the smoke curling upward into their spreading branches—had a spectral effect, like make-believe trees in a night scene at the theater.

The crowd jostled and sang and laughed and bought perfectly useless things that no one wanted, as crowds will at a fair. The throng about the dancers' booth grew denser. The cymbals crashed, and the band on the plaza struck up the old, familiar tune, "La Golondrina."

"The same tune!" Gillespie thought, amused. "Haven't they another?" Then he remembered Lolita, the swallow.

Don Manuel had just hailed another friend, and they would probably talk for an hour in their soft Spanish, voluble, happy, absorbed. Gillespie turned and shouldered his way through the crowd, pushing aside the water carrier and the porters. He was big, and he made his way through them to the dancers' booth.

This was set up like a toy theater, with three sides and a roof. Tiny oil lamps, set in a row in front, served for footlights, smoking and flaring in every breeze. Lolita and her black-browed partner were dancing the *jarabe* again—dancing opposite to each other, coming together, passing, turning around, reversing their positions. Lolita's little feet scarcely touched the ground as her lithe young body swayed, twisted, and turned. Her chin was lifted, her whitened throat was like a column. In the cheap little cotton-covered booth, in her tawdry scarlet and purple dancing dress, she looked exotic, like a passion

flower. Her dark eyes were feverish, her cheeks hectic with rouge, her shaved eyebrows delicately arched, and her painted lips apart.

"She's the dance personified," Gillespie thought. "Gosh, I never saw such motion—such grace!"

The acrid smoke from the little footlights blew out into his face and nearly suffocated him, but he stayed. He had to watch her, for she drew him like a magnet. He felt a tightening in his throat.

"That darned peon has no right to touch her!" he muttered.

Jostled and elbowed about, he heard the word "gringo" more than once, and grinned at it. Perhaps his grin was worse than a scowl. He knew that they wanted him out of the way, and were trying to drive him from his vantage ground in the front row, but he stayed.

He was waiting when Lolita came out, a black *rebozo* floating over her head and her white shoulders, an end of it falling down over her scarlet dress. In some way Gillespie thrust between her and the black-browed partner—thrust in effectually and got her hand under his arm, piloting her through the throng.

He got her out into the quiet of a side street, leaving the plaza behind them, with the cymbals crashing there, the mouth organs going, and laughter and light and color. The little *calle* was deserted. The cobblestones in the center were wet with soap suds, the sidewalk was high and narrow. The houses were dark behind their barred windows, but overhead the stars were coming out.

"I want to take you to supper," Gillespie said awkwardly, suddenly red in the darkness of the narrow street. "You must be tired."

She laughed up at him, her eyes bright under the black *rebozo*.

"Hurry!" she whispered. "Juan might hurt you, you"—she laughed ripplingly—"you gringo!"

She had been expecting him, the witch! He saw it, it pleased him, and he got redder about the ears. He knew that he was violating the customs of class and caste, and that Don Manuel would snub him mockingly; but he took her to the only hotel and ordered supper. Ducks? Yes, she loved them! Ducks and fried potatoes, chocolate and Neapolitan ribbon ice cream—no light repast! She sat across the

table from him, eating daintily, and her hands were beautiful.

"I suppose she's only a peon, but gosh, she's lovely!" he thought.

He caught the long sweep of her dark eyelashes, as she looked down and looked up, and the curve of her painted lips.

They smoked their cigarettes together.

"Why didn't you come and dance with me?" she asked him in her soft, adorable Spanish.

"I dance like a bear," said Gillespie. "You'd laugh at me."

She shook her head, smiling.

"I'll teach you, *señor*! Not to dance is not to live, eh?"

He nodded, his cigarette in his fingers.

"Not to dance with you is certainly not to live happily!" he countered, in fair Spanish.

His accent was bad, but he did not know it. The dancing girl did, but she smiled at him caressingly.

"*Señor*, you speak Spanish so divinely!" she whispered, trailing the ashes of her cigarette across her empty plate.

She was watching the window nervously. It was near the street level, and she wondered if Juan Carnero was out there. Juan was as plain and solid as his name, which, translated, means John Mutton; but there was nothing of the mutton, or the lamb, either, about him, and Lolita knew it.

She let her white finger tips touch the gringo's hand. He wore a gold band ring, with a diamond sunk in it, on his little finger. Lolita saw the diamond.

"Ah!" she sighed. "It is beautiful—I like it!"

Gillespie reddened again, glancing down at it, but he did not give it to her—not then.

"I will teach you to dance, *señor*."

"With you, Lolita?"

She nodded, blowing the smoke up in rings. She looked pretty, too, when she did it, though some women lose all semblance of beauty in the act. They sat a long time over their cigarettes and their chocolate. Lolita would not drink coffee, but she loved the sweet, thick chocolate that is beaten until it froths.

Finally he walked home with her. They went to a low adobe house in the outskirts of the town, where she said her aunt lived. The sky had cleared, and the moon silvered the dirty cobblestones and cast a fairy veil over the ugly hovels. The girl hung on his

arm at parting, her ripe lips lifted; but something stirred in Gillespie. He made her a formal bow and kissed her hand.

"To-morrow, *señorita*—to-morrow!" he said gallantly.

The "*señorita*" startled Lolita, for she was not used to it; but she fluttered in and closed the door on it, and he walked away, his pulses stirred. A lovely creature, a passion flower, and yet she knew how to take care of herself! He had felt that—felt it in the firmness of her supple hands, in the flash of her dark eyes.

Nevertheless, he walked home in a dream, unaware that a shadow followed, squat and black-browed and substantial, clad in white drawers, *calzones*, a white blouse, and a solferino sash. Once Gillespie thought he caught a glint of white in the darkness; but the fair was over, the fires were out on the plaza, and, far off, he saw the watchman's lantern, a tiny twinkle in the night.

II

GILLESPIE had a house on the street below the casino. He had taken it when he was a mine superintendent, before the numerous insurrections closed down the mines and shot up the prices. He had stayed on, hoping that something would turn up, or that things would quiet down. Besides, he loved the cool *patio*, its old well with a bucket on a rusty pulley, and its pots of fuchsias, pink calyxes with great purple bells hanging. He loved to see the doves come down and pick at the grain that he threw on the old brick pavement.

Old Chepa, an ancient peon woman, cooked and washed for him and watched over him, her shrewd black eyes twinkling in a brown face that was puckered like a dried persimmon.

"She's a bully cook," he told Don Manuel, who had recommended her; "but she seasons pretty high. As a rule I'm like Fido—after meals I sit with my tongue out."

He had a victrola to amuse his dull moments. There was no theater in San Juan, except for the pictures, and time had hung on his hands since the mines suspended work. Chepa loved the victrola when he slipped in the operatic records, for she had the peon's passion for music; but she did not like it set to play dance music for Lolita, when the girl came there to teach Gillespie to dance.

Chepa peeped at her out of the kitchen. Lolita, in a clinging black garment that made her look like a reed, swayed and danced in the *patio*, her hands over her head, her white arms bare except for the silver bangles that Gillespie had bought for her. She had looked at them longingly when they passed the jeweler's window.

"I can give you bracelets, Lolita," he said lightly. "They're only silver, and they're cheap, for your money isn't worth half as much as ours."

After that silver bangles jangled on her round arms. She loved flowers, too, when he gave them to her. She had a passion for orchids—rare ones.

"This is the best," she said of a pure white one, as she laid it fondly against the apricot bloom of her cheek.

Then she laughed at his efforts to learn to dance.

Chepa, looking on from the kitchen door, a reluctant chaperon, babbled of this scandalous thing to Diego, the water carrier.

"The baggage comes here and dances in the *patio*. What would you? Oh, these gringos!"

Diego, pouring a pailful of hot water into the tin tub for the miracle of Gillespie's daily bath, growled out his question:

"How does the gringo dance, Chepa?"

She cackled.

"Like the bull in the ring when the *banderilleros* prod him!"

Diego wagged his head.

"He washes too much! Is he so dirty that he needs both pails of water to clean him?" Then, straightening up to balance the empty pails on his long pole, he added another question—a leading one: "Think you he'll marry Lolita?"

"Marry Lolita? Psst! Up there they marry six, maybe seven women!"

"*Caramba!*" Diego's mouth fell open. "You lie, Chepa. No man could live at all in the same house with seven women!"

"Not at once, you fool," Chepa retorted scornfully. "These gringos divorce them, one at a time, but they marry six, or even ten. *Quien sabe?* But Lolita? *Cà—Lolita!*" She spat the name out scornfully. "The little baggage!"

III

THE affair went on. For two weeks Lolita danced at a theater in the next town. Gillespie followed her over there and watched her, fascinated.

"Of course it's madness," he told himself in his sane moments; "but how pretty she is, how refined! It's a kind of duty to save her from that ferocious peon. She's afraid of him."

Don Manuel warned him with that light touch of mockery which made a small matter of it.

"There's a story that she's infatuated with that black-browed *Othello*. Better beware, Gillespie!"

"Piffle!" Gillespie laughed. "She's glad to be rid of him. You mean that black beetle in the white panties? Imagine a girl like Lolita caring for that animal! She says she despises him."

"Um!" Don Manuel smoked a little. "You trust her—La Golondrina?"

"See here!" replied Gillespie angrily. "She's a good girl, Manuel—I want you to know it. She's refined, too. She couldn't care for that low brute!"

Don Manuel grinned.

"She's a peon, my friend."

"She may be, but she's no more like—like old Chepa than a rose is like a cabbage. As for this Juan—what's his name? Mutton? I may have to thrash him yet, for bothering her."

"Better be careful! They carry knives in their sashes," Don Manuel said lightly.

"I tell you she hates him," Gillespie retorted, annoyed. "A girl like that with such an animal—pearls before swine!"

At the moment, Lolita was having her own troubles. Juan was jealous—blackly, brutally jealous, after the fashion of his kind.

"The gringo!" He cursed Gillespie picturesquely, fluently, with amazing epithets. "Lolita, he follows you!"

"*Cà!*" she shrugged. "You hate him just because our people don't like the gringos. You follow the others—you're like a sheep instead of a mutton!" she mocked him insultingly.

Juan Carnero was furious.

"*Diablo*, you shall not go with the gringo, Lolita!" he thundered. "I'll stop you—I will, I swear it!"

Lolita, the refined, the lovely, forgot herself for the moment. She ran out her tongue at him.

That day being Sunday, Gillespie took the girl out for a long motor ride in the mountains. There was one fair road, and he had the only high-power machine in

San Juan. It was a curiosity there, almost as exciting as the band chariot of a circus. It drew a crowd when he passed in it. Consequently all San Juan saw Lolita in the car at his side, her black *rebozo* floating about the lovely oval of her face, her red lips parted a little, her great eyes sparkling.

Evidently the gringo was hooked. What if he wanted to marry her? Lolita's brain was a busy one, full of gay images. She wondered how she would look in the great cities up there, if she went.

If she went! She stole a look sidewise at Gillespie. He was not handsome—he was big, raw-boned, sandy-haired, and freckled, and to-day he wore motor goggles that made him look like a frog. Lolita loved the beautiful and the fierce. The latter quality appealed to her like a dash of red pepper in the sauce.

"Lolita," said Gillespie, "do you love Juan Carnero?"

She was startled. Her eyes widened.

"*Caramba!*" She breathed the exclamation softly, leaning toward Gillespie, her white hand on his sleeve, appealing, caressing. "I'm only a poor peon girl, *señor*. What chance had I to escape such as Juan?"

Gillespie slowed the machine down, looking into her eyes.

"You're clever, Lolita—you could study. Suppose"—he hesitated—"suppose I sent you to school, to a convent, up in the States, and had you educated? Would you go, Lolita?"

She did not answer at once. Her fingers tightened on his sleeve. She averted her face, and he did not see the wide horror in her eyes.

"I couldn't leave you for so long, *señor!*" she whispered, lifting her face to his.

It was sheer madness, but he bent down, and for the first time their lips met.

Almost at the same moment there was a sharp report, and Gillespie felt a stinging pain in his right shoulder. He stopped the car and leaped to his feet, but Lolita slid down into the bottom of the car and clung to his knees.

"Go on!" she screamed. "Go on! Bandits, *señor*, bandits!"

Gillespie had meant to get out and fight the ambushed enemy, for he was furious at the attack; but he could not risk the girl. He started his car and went down the hill at a wild rate, not once looking

back. Lolita, lying in a crumpled heap at his feet, sobbed with terror until she saw the blood trickling down his sleeve.

"Señor, you are hurt!"

"Only a scratch," he replied, remembering the rules of the game. One must always call it a scratch. "Lolita, there was only one shot. Do you think it could have been bandits?"

She was beside him now, trying to stanch his wound with her handkerchief, and he did not see how pale she was.

"Of a surety, señor! Who else?" she whispered, white-lipped, for she had seen a familiar squat figure in the chaparral.

Gillespie stopped the car while she wound her *rebozo* around his wounded shoulder. There was a little thrill of shock running through him, and a great anger.

"Lolita, it was that black beetle, Juan Carnero. You know it!"

He felt her tremble. Some beauties pale before daylight, as the stars pale before the sunrise, but Lolita's defied the daylight. Her skin was firm, her cheeks were round, her smooth lips were red, her brown eyes, when the sun shone into them, were yellow like amber. She looked up at him, exquisite, appealing.

"You are safe, señor!" she whispered.

"Lolita!" He stopped. The thrill of madness was in him, and he had almost asked her to marry him, but he did not. He would wait. She must be taught, first, must be polished, must see the world.

"Lolita, you hate this Juan Carnero?"

She nodded, her cheeks aflame.

"Of a surety, señor—that animal!"

Gillespie slipped his unhurt arm about her and bent his head.

"I love you!" he whispered chokingly.

"You—you mustn't accuse him," she pleaded. "Juan, I mean, señor." Her face was pale as she caressed the gringo, his bangles jingling on her white arms. "These peons—there would be trouble, you understand? I—"

Gillespie suddenly remembered to start the car again.

"I'll do nothing," he promised her, "except to make you safe, Lolita!"

IV

THE next day Juan Carnero stopped Chepa in the market place, his face haggard and his eyes ablaze.

"Will the gringo marry my Lolita?" he demanded hoarsely.

His fingers were feeling for the knife in his sash. It is a handy place for a knife or a bottle, that sash!

"Psst!" Chepa tossed her head. "Do you take my gringo for a donkey? Listen!" She put her skinny old hand to her mouth and whistled in Juan's ear. "My gringo has at least five photographs of *señoritas*—dressed not at all at the top, save with jewels—*Americanas*, all of them, on his table. *Cá, Lolita!*" she cackled, gathering up a bunch of garlic and nibbling it like cake. "The little baggage comes and dances with him in his house—you hear that, Juan Carnero?" She tapped his arm. "The little baggage!"

Juan jerked his arm away.

"*Diablo*, shut up, or I'll kill you, you old croaker!" he snarled fiercely.

Chepa tittered, but she moved away with her garlic.

"*Madre de Dios*, all men are fools!" she said to herself, and bought some meat and fruit for her husband with the gringo's money. "He takes no count of it, the animal," she told herself, "and there's poor Pablo needing a little *pulque* and some tobacco. I'll get a little—there's all this money! It grows on trees up there, Catalina," she told the woman who sold cigarettes. "You shake a gringo and he sheds it—like that!"

Lolita had come back to San Juan. In the little adobe house on the outskirts of the town she sat on the dirt floor in the kitchen and ate *tortillas*, while her aunt, a shriveled old peon, scolded her.

"The gringo will not marry you, Lolita," she warned her niece. "These fine gentlemen—you know them, you hussy! Let him alone!"

Lolita ate the savory mess with her fingers, licking them afterward. She laughed saucily.

"See my bangles, *tía!*"

The old woman was scornful.

"*Madre de Dios*, bangles—and he is made of money, Chepa says!"

Lolita laughed, shaking some money out of her silk purse.

"See—I got that for dancing. Go buy yourself some shoes, *tía!* You're bare-foot."

The old woman looked down over her voluminous petticoats—she wore three of them—and tried to see her own feet.

"My shoes are good enough," she said

shrilly; but she was pleased, and took the money. "Juan Carnero loves you," she added. "There's a man for you! You should marry him, Lolita. You're getting old, and there are wrinkles under your eyes."

Lolita rose to her feet, furious.

"Donkey!" she screamed, stamping her foot at her aunt. "Give me back that money! I shall marry the gringo and spit at you when I pass!"

But the old woman evaded her, running out with the money in her hand.

Gillespie sat alone at his desk, inventing excuses for staying in Mexico. The mines had finally closed down, and he was expected to report to the company in New York; but there was Lolita. He leaned his elbow upon his letter, and stared out into the *patio*. It was late afternoon, and a sweet dusk prevailed there. He could see a white pigeon strutting about on the old red bricks of the pavement, and a humming bird darting in and out of the pepper tree. He could hear Chepa cutting the corn for the *tortillas*, and there was a savory odor of cooking.

Chepa no longer approved of him, for the episode of Lolita was an offense against her code; yet it was an innocent episode so far. Gillespie had treated Lolita as she deserved. She was lovely, refined, and good. He must keep her image clear in his mind, like the image of one of her saints. If only she could be educated!

He thought deeply. She was a peon, and he had always believed that like must marry like, but she—she loved him, dear girl! If he obeyed the summons and went to New York, he left her, his passion flower, to the horrible fate of marriage in her own class—to Juan Carnero!

He rose from his seat and went out into the *patio*. The sweet air was full of perfume, and he inhaled it with a sigh. Lolita loved him! He felt it—felt the caress of her hands, of her red lips. How could he leave her to the man she hated and despised? She had outgrown Juan. She had read with Gillespie, and he was teaching her English. She had clung to him when he gave her a string of gold beads for that lovely young throat. How could he leave her?

"Manuel, she's like a flower, fair and sweet, in a garden of thistles," he told his friend in a burst of feeling. "I—hang it

all, how can I leave a girl like that to be persecuted by a black-browed beetle of a peon?"

Don Manuel lit a cigarette.

"Are you going to marry her, Gillespie?" he inquired blandly.

Gillespie stared in front of him. At the time they were out on the plaza, and he saw an old peon woman approaching. She was on her way to the station, and it is easier to wear all your clothes than to carry them in a bundle, when you are traveling. According to custom on such occasions, she wore five full petticoats, one on top of another, a white cotton blouse, and a green cotton *rebozo*. She resembled an old and hideous doll pincushion on legs.

"When she grows old—" suggested Don Manuel sweetly.

"Oh, damn!" said Gillespie.

That night he forgot it all. He took Lolita out in his car, and they raced along under the old oil lamps that were swung on chains across the narrow streets. The car rattled and bumped over the cobblestones, but they were alone and together!

"Lolita," he said gravely, "I'm going to take you out of all this—away from that black-browed admirer of yours." He looked deep into her lovely eyes. "You are sure you do not love him, Lolita?"

"He's a pig!" said Lolita disdainfully, fingering the ring on Gillespie's finger—the ring which she liked so much, but which he had not given her. "I hate pigs!" she whispered.

In the dark shadow of the *pulqueria* at the corner, Juan stood and watched them. Then he went into the back of the shop. They had a big grindstone there to sharpen the kitchen knives. Juan Carnero—John Mutton—sharpened one of them, and tried it on his finger. It was good steel, long and exceedingly narrow.

V

WHEN a beautiful girl loves an honorable man, he cannot well leave her in the lurch. Gillespie fully realized that, as he thought matters over. He had to go north, he had to leave Mexico soon, and it might be long before he returned. There was always a new revolution, and the mines would remain shut down while the disorders lasted. He could not leave Lolita to a fate she despised.

If only he could settle with that peon, if only the fellow would vanish from the

scene! But Juan Carnero, otherwise John Mutton, showed no active symptoms of dissolution. He kept out of Gillespie's way, it was true, but he followed Lolita patiently, persistently. Indeed, in the matter of following Lolita, Mary's little lamb had nothing on John Mutton.

Gillespie was positive that Juan had fired the shot from ambush which had wounded him in the shoulder; but the wound was almost completely healed now, and he could not openly accuse the man. Lolita still insisted that it was a bandit, and absolutely refused to admit that it might be Juan. In fact, she vowed she had seen an utterly strange face in the chaparral.

Gillespie could not break down her conviction, but she was nervous, and did not like to talk of it. He humored her, but he spoke confidentially to the *comandante*.

"That Juan Carnero is a dangerous fellow. I believe he tried to kill me."

Juan found himself watched. Once, at the *pulqueria*, he got news of it. Diego, the water carrier, had heard it from Chepa, and Juan told Lolita with great bitterness.

"Your cursed gringo would ruin me! This time I shall kill him, Lolita!"

Things could not go on like this. Lolita knew it—none better; yet she flashed out in the gorgeous dress of the dancer, and looped her hair high with a rhinestone comb that Gillespie had given her. There were rhinestone buckles on her high-heeled slippers, and her stockings were silk. Juan watched all this, his heart boiling within him.

There was a *fiesta* going on, and the Indians had come in to dance in front of the church. The priest had tried to keep them from dancing in front of a sacred place, but he could not. It was an ancient custom, and they kept on dancing.

It was night, and the lights flared beside the little stands for fruit and candy. Some of the Indian women were selling their baskets, and the band was playing on the plaza. Lolita strolled along the path with Gillespie.

"Lolita," he said gently, "when I was shot up there in the hills, you really thought it was a bandit?"

Her eyes widened, but she nodded, paling under her rouge.

"Two bandits, *señor*—I saw them!"

Gillespie doubted for the first time.

"Lolita, you were nervous. I'm sure it was that Juan Carnero."

"That pig? No, no, *señor*—he hasn't the courage!" she cried, clinging to the gringo's arm and trying to steer him away, for she thought she saw Juan in the distance. "*Señor*, I want some ice cream!"

An ice cream man was approaching. In one hand he had a pail of water, in the other an iron rack with glasses and spoons, and on his head was the freezer. Gillespie hesitated.

"I'll get you something better from the casino, Lolita," he objected.

She would not listen. She was like a spoiled child.

"I must have it now, *señor*!"

"Oh, well!" Gillespie laughed, thrusting his hand into his pocket.

The ice cream man set down his glasses and his pail, and lifted the freezer from his head. Lolita screamed. It was Juan Carnero—Juan disguised as an ice cream man!

Gillespie, feeling in his pocket for the change, was startled by her cry. He looked up, dazed. The plaza seemed full of flares of red light and smoke from many lamps. The crowd was closing in about them, dark-browed, jabbering, voluble. Lolita had reeled back, clutching at his sleeve, her eyes wide.

"Juan!" she shrieked. "Juan!"

There was the flash of a knife, and the dark-browed peon threw himself at her. His blade flashed, the crowd screamed, and Gillespie leaped on the peon. The American was a big man and could hit hard. He struck John Mutton squarely on the jaw, a knock-out blow. The knife spun in the air, there was a crash, and Juan went down, his head in the freezer, and lay still.

He lay so still that Lolita gasped. Her eyes dilated as she stared at him.

"*Madre de Dios!*" she cried. "He is dead—Juan Carnero is dead!"

The crowd was clamorous. The watchman broke through it with difficulty, and Gillespie called to him in Spanish.

"This fellow tried to kill Lolita! He isn't dead. Get him, arrest him—he tried to murder us!"

The watchman was puzzled.

"Is he dead or not? What say you, Diego?"

"The knife—"

They pointed—it was red.

Gillespie threw an arm around Lolita.

"My darling, you're bleeding!" he cried, love leaping up like a flame at the sight of blood on her dress.

At first she stared at him, dazed. Then, suddenly, she struck at him. She beat him with her two fists.

"Brute!" she screamed. "Brute! Pig! You've hurt Juan!"

Juan, sitting up, found the watchman grasping him.

"You had the knife—you'll come with me," he said firmly. "Did you try to kill Lolita? She's bleeding!"

"He did it—I saw him do it!" a voice piped up.

Thrusting Gillespie aside, Lolita ran to Juan and fell on her knees. The black-browed lover was bleeding from mouth and nose and eyebrows, for the freezer had cut him badly. The watchman had him under the arms, dragging him up, helped by Diego; but Lolita clung to him, sobbing, and held him down by the legs.

"Do not take him!" she gasped. "It was only play—Juan was threatening me in jest! *Señores*, it is true! The stupid gringo knocked Juan down and half killed him—look how he is bleeding! Take the gringo!"

Gillespie gasped. The dark-faced crowd was closing in.

"Lolita," he said sharply, "you're mad!"

But she heard him not. She beat off the water carrier, clinging to Juan Carnero.

"Juan! Juan!" she cried. "See, *señores*, I love him! If he had hurt me on

purpose, would I love him, I ask you? It was all the stupid gringo! I'm going to marry Juan!"

"Oh, Lolita!" Juan sobbed. "*Madre de Dios*, it was the freezer that cut my face! I—"

She stamped at the watchman.

"It was the gringo's fault! Take the big gringo! I will marry Juan—you can't take him to jail if I'm willing to marry him! Where is the *padre*?"

A priest had come shouldering through the throng. There had been a fight, the peons' knives are sharp, and he thought he might be needed. How often he had been needed!

"*Padre*!" Lolita's lips were white under the paint, as she clung to her man. They should not put him in jail! "*Padre*, marry us now!" she sobbed.

The watchman loosened his grip.

"Oh, if you'll marry him—"

He hesitated, looking at the blood on the girl's dress; but he knew women. He shrugged.

Juan clasped Lolita, mumbling, tears running down into the ice cream salt and the blood on his face.

The *padre* looked about him.

"You have a ring?"

"Permit me!" Gillespie slipped a plain gold band, with a single diamond, off his finger. "The gringo would like to give the ring."

IF SUMMER KNEW

Oh, tell me why does summer laugh

When she is young and fair,
And all the world is out to quaff
The wine that's in the air?

Has she the potion tried in part
Which she herself did brew
For lovers' lips, and is her heart
Aflame with passion, too?

Oh, tell me why does summer weep
When she is old and pale,
When lovers trysts no longer keep
In wood and lane and dale?

Has she discovered love must soon
With beauty pass away?
She does not know the love of June
Sometimes survives till May!

William Wallace Whitelock

The Green Amulet

HOW EVELYN MARSH MADE A SERIOUS MISTAKE IN JUDGING
THE VALUES OF MEN AND OF JEWELS

By Laura Burton Miller

BEFORE the swaying mirror Evelyn Marsh gave a final fluff to her crown of golden curls, and her deep blue eyes met the eyes in the mirror complacently. Cornflower blue was her shade. She always looked her best in it, for it matched her eyes and brought out the apple-blossom pink and white of her skin.

It was a pity, she fretted, that she had met only one eligible man on the boat. Indeed, properly speaking, Ward Nichols could hardly be included in that category. He was smart, perhaps, in a bookish sort of way; but then she had never cared for that particular variety of brains—the non-producing kind, absorbing all the time, never doing big, constructive, money-making things. Why couldn't life be different, she wondered?

She should never have met Nichols, but that other man—Paul Markham. She had looked him up on the passenger list, impelled by a sudden impulse to learn the name of the tall, dark-eyed man whose gaze she so often found intently fixed on her, and yet who made no advances toward securing an introduction. Only a few hours ago, walking on deck, with Nichols at her side, she had brushed past Markham, and had felt her footsteps falter and the red blood mount to her forehead as his compelling eyes met hers. She wondered if Ward, too, had noticed how Markham always stared after them; but he remained aloof, while as for Nichols—

She shrugged her shoulders disdainfully as she threw about her a coat of misty blue and closed the cabin door behind her.

On deck she found Ward waiting for her—which surprised her not at all. He was never late, always impatiently pacing the deck until she came in sight. His eyes, dark gray beneath the sweep of black

lashes, appraised her admiringly as he led her to their chairs. She loved that look in men's eyes. It was the manna on which she had always fed, yet the sweet flavor of it never palled.

"Out here," he said, as he carefully tucked the rug about her, "the stars seem more neighborly—really quite near and friendly. I sat here for hours, last night, after you left me."

"Was the lady dark and stately with a red rose in her hair?" she teased, brushing the truant tendrils of hair back from her low forehead. "I mean the unknown girl with whom you sat so late last night. I had rather hoped that I was the first and the last."

The man's tone was serious as he leaned forward.

"You know, of course, of whom I was thinking—of whom I have thought so constantly since that first night I saw you, seven days ago. I thought of you, and of the shining loveliness of you. Child, do you know how rare you are? How wonderful a thing it is to have found you! How different you are from those others!" He waved his hand contemptuously. "Those millions of other women, restless, soulless, reaching out silly little hands for gaudy baubles, trotting in a sheeplike trail in frenzied pursuit of the things in life that count for nothing!"

Evelyn smiled, her eyes luminous and tender as they met his gaze. She wondered if she was expected to say anything.

This man was always upsetting her poise and putting her in the strangest positions. There were moments when she could think of nothing to say. Perhaps that was why she cared so little for him. His intensity was uncomfortable. Then, too, he danced poorly. Still, at times he was rather in-

teresting—now, for instance, telling her how marvelous she was.

For a moment she lost the thread of his talk. Then she asked demurely, as her hand touched his:

"Am I so terribly different from the girl you left behind you—the girl at the dock in Liverpool, the slender, boyish-looking thing in gray?"

"She!" He laughed. "That was Polly Fentress, one of the best little pals a fellow ever had. She and her mother once nursed me through a month's illness. They were wonderful to me! I must tell you about it some time."

"Heavens, how she adores you!" There was a faint touch of scorn in Evelyn's voice. "She looked at you with her whole heart in her eyes. The scene was really rather touching. Quite a coincidence, isn't it, that I should have been so near, and should have seen that tender leave-taking?"

"Evelyn, you are absurd! I almost believe you are jealous. You let your imagination run away with you. Certainly you imagined the glamour of romance, of which there really was none. Feeling there was—lots of it. I haven't two better friends in the world than Polly and Mrs. Fentress. They are the salt of the earth; but as for falling in love with Polly, no such idea has ever crossed my mind."

"It happens to have crossed hers," Evelyn commented dryly, remembering vividly the hurt in the girl's honest brown eyes as Ward Nichols had left her side.

Then, being wise in the lore of women-kind, she pursued the subject no further.

"Some day I shall take you to see them. I want them to know you," he continued earnestly. "You haven't given me your word that you are going back to China with me, but I know you are going. I love you too much ever to let you say no!"

His brown hand closed over hers possessively as he drew her toward him, to kiss the upturned face with its sweep of long lashes. He liked the faint reluctance with which she met his caresses. It was that shy, virginal quality of mind and heart that made him long so tenderly to possess her—that and the sweetness and sincerity of her nature, written plainly for all the world to see in the unearthly loveliness of her face.

From the first he had thought of her as *Elaine*, a lily maid, white and golden, or as

Guinevere in the days when, stainless, *Arthur* first loved her. Evelyn's beauty made real for him all other exquisite flower women who had ever lived in song or story. Haltingly he told her of his fancies.

"You're so funny!" she laughed, her eyes following a shooting star. "You're like an old-fashioned waltz, when every one else is playing jazz. I don't think I could ever quite learn to understand you. You know, you're awfully queer!"

"I suppose I am a sentimentalist." He smiled ruefully, reaching into his pocket. "I certainly can't offer this as evidence that I am not." He held before her a small, dark box, flat and shabby. "You see, I've carried this around with me for almost a year, expecting some day to give it to the one woman, when I found her."

Evelyn stretched out her hand toward the box, but he drew it away, imprisoning her fingers with his free hand.

"No, not yet! By moonlight, even such moonlight as this, it would not be anything but commonplace. To be really beautiful it must catch the light. You will see it later. You understand, of course, that it is yours—that I have come to the end of my quest."

"What is it?" the girl asked impatiently.

"Something over which I have allowed myself to grow quite sentimental. It's a long story, but, briefly told, the facts are these:

"On one of my engineering jaunts into the interior of China I met with one of the strangest experiences that has ever come to me—and my life has not been uneventful, by any means. In one of these ancient cities, so old that it makes you shiver to think of its antiquity, I happened to do a good turn to one of those queer old dignitaries. A sort of a feudal overlord he was, and he looked to be about as old as the city. Anyhow, he was quite ill, though more frightened than sick, I think, for the simple remedies that I happened to have in my emergency kit did wonders for the old man. He fairly licked my hand with gratitude, and wanted to give me just about everything he had; but I ended up by accepting nothing but this charm. He would have me take it, although I have always felt mean about it since. I knew little about it until I reached Peking, and there they made such a fuss over it in the shops that I began to appreciate it. You see, it

is centuries old, and is endowed with all sorts of mystic properties. It has been known to heal blindness—or so I was solemnly assured—and to reunite parted lovers. Oh, it has a breath-taking history, and at that, I don't know the half of it!"

She reached for the box, and again he caught her to him, burying his face in her soft hair. For a moment she lay quiescently in his arms; then she drew herself away.

"Don't!" he said huskily. "You will never tell me that you love me. Say it now, or I will never let you go!"

"Why, of course I do," she murmured dreamily, as she slipped from his embrace. "Heavens, how you must have mussed my hair!"

She opened up her silver vanity, and in a shaft of moonlight repaired the damage his ardor had brought about. He watched her silently, a cold fear gripping his heart. Powder and paint at a moment like this—one of life's heaven-touched moments when all the things that were little and paltry and sordid seemed æons away—and Evelyn was powdering her nose!

The little box in his hand felt as heavy as lead; but as she again turned toward him her lovely face, exalted, beautiful with the spiritual quality that held him in thrall, he felt no misgivings, no doubts, no fears. Women were bafflingly strange. He did not know them well enough to understand their inexplicable complexities.

She rose from her chair and walked to the railing, and together they stood watching the swirling foam in the wake of the great liner.

"This is our last night at sea," he reminded her softly. "There will be other nights, of course, stretching into the distance, with you always beside me. There will be summer nights under such a sky as this; autumn nights, frosty and chill, with firelight flickering on the wall; winter nights, piled deep with snow, the world shut out from our paradise; spring nights, out with you under a rain-swept sky—you and I!"

"Wonderful!" she murmured, her eyes downcast, her hands gripping the railing.

"To-morrow, New York. I resent the change," he exclaimed, his hand infolding the cool, white hand on the railing before him. "I shall find you at the Devon?"

"At the Devon," she repeated after him, smiling whimsically into the darkness—a secretive, purely personal little smile. Why,

she might not stop at the Devon at all! Rather than be bored by the tragic intensity of this man, whom she had met by chance when they were but one day out, she would perhaps rearrange her plans. There wasn't any further use of cultivating his acquaintance.

Ward was saying something in that slow, measured voice of his, but her busy thoughts would not let her listen. There was something undeniably attractive about him. He was nice-looking in a quiet, undistinguished way, but he was poor and with no prospects—one could see that at a glance. He was an engineer, and engineers were usually visionary, head-in-the-clouds men who amounted to nothing.

Then, grudgingly, she admitted the truth. She was afraid of him—afraid that she would learn to care for him. There was something lovable about him, but he was hopelessly old-fashioned. Ye gods, he should wear velvet knee breeches, with a fall of lace at the sleeve! In the darkness she chuckled faintly to herself.

Again she heard Ward's voice, earnest, impassioned.

"I shall never, never let you go. I'm foolishly superstitious about our happiness. The gods will grow envious. I wish I could halt time at this moment!"

"Ward, you are so intense!" she said. "Of course, you—we will eventually come to earth. Every one does. One can't stay in the clouds always. It is very late—see how high the moon is. Come, I must be going!"

He kissed her good night lingeringly, reverently, and as she stepped ahead of him he handed her the shabby box.

"Wait! Don't open it now," he commanded, and, slipping it into the pocket of her coat, she went with him below deck.

Once again in her room, she took out Ward's gift, eyeing the time-worn, battered black box with mingled curiosity and repugnance. She pressed the spring, and saw, against the dingy bright red lining, an ornament of jade green.

She picked it up and examined it curiously. It was a weird oriental gewgaw—a dragon with minutely carved wings and tail, and on the filigree border a floral design, probably representing lotus petals. She threw it from her indifferently. The curio shops at home and abroad were full of such things. It was rather pretty, and a decidedly good imitation of genuine jade,

but it could have been picked up from any dirty, dishonest vender in Chinatown.

She recalled Ward's romantic story, and dismissed it with a laugh. He had told it remarkably well—so well that, in spite of his evident lack of funds, she had expected to see something of real value. Sentimentalist! A cheap, sentimental fool, trying to cover with a veil of illusion a commonplace, worthless bit of imitation jade!

She would not go to the Devon. As long as she lived, she wanted never to see Ward Nichols again. He was a silly, romantic simpleton—absolutely impossible. There was nothing to be gained from meeting him again. Drowsily this thought filled her mind as she drifted off to sleep.

II

THE next morning, by dint of much clever maneuvering, Evelyn managed to avoid Nichols until, in the excitement of sighting New York's welcome sky line, there was no time for a *tête-à-tête*. He walked with her down the gangway, his eyes shining with enthusiasm and eager pleasure, his hair blown back boyishly from his brow. The crowd jostled and surged about them. Markham passed them, his handsome face inscrutable. To Evelyn he gave little more than a passing glance. She felt unaccountably piqued, and bit her under lip petulantly. This man was going out of her life. In another moment he would be lost from sight, and she had never even known him. She suddenly felt small and impotent and vaguely depressed.

"I shall call you at the Devon at about six," Ward said, his eyes noting every detail of the trim, tan-clad figure before him, her eyes half hidden by a small hat of the misty blue she affected.

"Very well," she assented, nervously smoothing her gloves over her finger tips.

He saw her to a taxi, and in a moment she was swallowed up in the whirling human vortex that is Manhattan.

"To the Ardmore," she told the driver.

She felt decidedly mean. It was too bad that she must deceive Nichols! He had helped wonderfully in relieving the tediousness of an ocean voyage, but one couldn't be swayed by sentiment alone.

The taxi came to a final halt, and Evelyn followed the heavily laden porter into the brightly lighted lobby of the Ardmore. As she registered, she felt, with that indefinable sixth sense which has come down

to us from our forest roaming ancestors, that she was being closely watched. Turning, she saw Paul Markham, and knew that the bold, scrawling name above hers was his. Excitement crept into her veins. He was here at her side!

She felt tempted to speak to him, to ask if he was as glad as she to be home again; but she stifled the impulse as he turned his back and walked, with that swinging, graceful stride of his, toward the elevators. She despised herself for having let slip a golden opportunity which she felt that she would always regret.

A few moments later she was at the telephone, calling a well known number—Schuyler 7128. Presently she heard her sister-in-law's voice, welcoming, questioning, gossipy, and pleasantly familiar. Yes, she found herself saying, she would come over immediately after dinner. Awfully good of them to want to give her such a welcome! Heavens, but country life in England was boring!

As she turned to open the swinging door of the telephone booth, she caught a fleeting glimpse of a pair of shoulders and the back of a dark head that looked familiar. Why, she could have sworn that in the next booth was Paul Markham! He hadn't left the lobby, after all.

She hummed a gay little tune under her breath as she stepped over the threshold of her room. Those frequent encounters with the dark-eyed fellow passenger could not all be wholly accidental. What if he, too, felt that swift attraction?

Rested, she dressed for dinner, elated by the happy sense of being once more in close kinship with Broadway, in having returned to her own New York. She clasped about her throat a string of pearls, looked at her reflection critically, and discarded the pearls as too lifeless against the orchid of her gown.

The jade green ornament—that might not look so bad. Threading it with an almost invisible chain of platinum, she tried the effect of its silvery green against the white column of her throat, and promptly decided in its favor.

Her thoughts flashed from the filigree circle to its giver. No doubt, at this moment, Ward Nichols was soundly berating the service at the Devon because of his inability to get in touch with her. She made a wry grimace. She wished she had not been compelled to resort to such a trick.

Diplomacy would have been better, perhaps, but it was slower, and not always so conclusive.

III

LILIAN MARSH'S house was always crowded with people—for the most part friends of Lilian's, though occasionally her husband dragged in a business acquaintance. There was a new man to-night, Lilian told Evelyn. Fred had just met him that afternoon, but he was charming—a big, well knit man, with wonderful eyes and a sensuously beautiful mouth.

"Fred has made quite a find, he's so distinguished and widely traveled and interesting," said Mrs. Marsh.

Evelyn smiled at her sprightly sister-in-law's enthusiasm, recognizing the ever apparent signs of Lilian's match-making propensities. She followed her into the living room, and suddenly found herself face to face with Paul Markham. She acknowledged the introduction with a smile, and recognized the glimmer of interest in his white, impassive face. It was impossible that they should have met by chance. She could not help thinking that Markham must have planned it.

"Why, this is getting to be positively uncanny—my seeing you here, there, and everywhere!" she cried.

He laughed, showing an even, white row of flawless teeth.

"I am delighted that I chanced to run across your brother, since it has brought about this meeting," he said.

Then Lilian bore him off triumphantly to further introductions. Evelyn's eyes followed him about the room, noting the grace of his movements, the indefinable earmarks of wealth and familiarity with ease and leisure, the quick, vivid impression he gave of strength and dominance. It was annoying that those other women monopolized him, that he did not break away from them and seek her out.

Toward the end of the evening she found him beside her, an ironic smile about his full lips.

"Did you think I had neglected you?" he asked, seating himself beside her.

"Not at all," she heard herself saying with a trace of irritation. "I haven't had much time in which to think at all. Every one has been lovely about welcoming me home again."

"Naturally," he remarked, his eyes

twinkling. "Don't begin by disliking me. We are going to be great friends!"

His eyes wandered to the white line of her throat, and there was a quick flash of desire, flaming, bold, fiercely covetous. Evelyn drew the silken folds of her scarf closer about her, feeling alternately repelled and attracted. There was something serpentlike in the cold glitter of his calculating eyes, and it filled her with distaste. Then the lids narrowed, and his face became masklike again.

He reached over and touched the green medallion about her neck. The girl felt a quickening of her blood at the contact. Her neck burned as if scorched by fire. It cost her an effort to conceal her agitation.

"You should always wear jade," he told her, reaching for a cigarette. "Did you run across that while on the continent?"

She laughed nervously.

"It was given me by a friend whom I met on my way across—merely as a souvenir of the voyage, you know."

"It is fortunate to have friends," he said, with a keen glance at her flushed face, a cynical smile hovering about his lips.

Evelyn looked away, holding her head very erect. Was it mere imagination, or was there something subtly insulting in his tone and his cool, appraising glance? She spoke coolly.

"It is rather a pretty shade," she said. "Then, too, it is an amulet, a very powerful one, able to bring sight to the blind and reunite parted lovers. At least, that is the old legend which came with it from the interior of China. Of course, that's an interesting story, but mere nonsense. I'm not at all superstitious."

He bent over her for another look at the ornament, and Evelyn felt herself trembling. Who was this man that he should have power to stir her senses in so unbelievable a manner? She felt curiously disquieted, yet elated. She was conscious that she had won his eager interest, that there was between them some inexplicable bond.

She covered the green circle with her fingers and asked idly:

"It has no real value, has it?"

He was silent for a moment. Then, as she repeated her question, he replied absent-mindedly:

"Unless, perhaps, as a charm from the Evil One."

"The question was absurd," she laughed, feeling rather foolish, as she detected the

faint derision in his words. "Tell me something about yourself."

Sketchily he told her of some of his wanderings, of events that had shaped his life, of quaint, out-of-the-way places where he had happened upon queer bits of life and unusual characters.

Listening, Evelyn wondered how much women had counted in his life. There must have been many of them. Big, brutal, intensely masculine, there was about him a lure that many women would find hard to resist. Hard and sophisticated as he was, Evelyn felt that his moods of tenderness would be quite wonderful. It would mean something to inspire love in such a man. It would not be difficult to hate him, and still easier to learn to care deeply.

The guests were leaving. As in an ecstatic trance, she felt Paul Markham's nearness as he held her coat for her and led her to the elevator and through the entrance into a taxi. She loved the rough feel of his shoulder against hers as they sped through the brilliantly lighted streets. They said little, but as they neared the Ardmore he asked if he might see her on the following night. Unhesitatingly she answered yes, her heart beating a staccato of joy.

Next day she had dinner with him, and they spent a gay, hilarious evening together, with Paul teasing, cajoling, tender and scornful by turns, wooing her boldly, compellingly. He was with her again the following afternoon, speeding her along in his high-powered gray car; and because he did not come that evening Evelyn felt tired and distraught, and stayed quietly and thoughtfully in her room—thinking of Paul, of the cruelly beautiful lines of his mouth, of the tempestuous ardor of his love-making, of the dark eyes that could burn like fire and smolder to ashes.

She saw him again the next morning, and there was dinner that evening in an obscure little restaurant, where the cooking was delicious and the music poignantly, heartbreakingly sweet.

Evelyn hummed the melodies dreamily, keeping time with her fingers on the tablecloth. Her blue eyes were sparkling with happiness, her face radiantly lovely.

Paul flicked his cigarette against the ash tray. Then he lifted his eyes to her face, surveying its ethereal loveliness coolly, critically.

"Your face, Evelyn, is the most perfect

alibi a woman ever had," he said insolently. "Lilith and Delilah must have had just such angel faces. Ah, those lovely, perfumed bundles of selfishness and sex appeal done up in white lace and baby blue ribbons—greedy little sinners with a golden halo about their heads!"

"Don't, Paul!" she pouted, hesitating between anger and good-natured acceptance of his mockery. "I'm not sure that I like that."

"Makes no difference—it's God's truth," he told her brutally. "I know your type!"

"A connoisseur in women, as in cars and clothes and jewels!" she responded, an acid tang to her words. "Sometimes I hate you!"

"Very seldom. You love me!" He leaned toward her, his hand reaching for hers. "And I—I rather care for you, my lady. I like to look at you in that dull blue crapy effect, with the jade against your beautiful neck."

A glow of pleasure came into her eyes.

"It's strange you should have taken such a fancy to this trinket." She fumbled at the green circle above the silk of her gown. "I have never particularly fancied it. Since I am not at all superstitious, while you are steeped in all that nonsense, I might as well pass it on to you."

He looked at her in surprise, with a gleam of excitement in his dark eyes, as she unfastened the delicate chain about her throat and handed him the quaint, old-world ornament.

"Are you quite sure that you want to part with it?"

His manner was hesitant, embarrassed. Evelyn had never seen him so lacking in poise.

"Certainly," she replied. "I hope it brings you luck. I've had my share, in meeting you and learning to know you and love you!"

She spoke passionately, casting to the winds all thoughts of reserve. Paul knew well enough that she was his, heart and body and soul, for the mere asking. What use was it to try vainly to hide the depths of her feelings?

"You darling!" His eyes caressed her as he slipped into his purse the quaint trifle that had caught his fancy. "I hope you will never regret having given away your amulet—or your heart!"

They left the restaurant and strolled down the street until they came in sight of

the river. He led her to a seat, and, in the shadows, he caught her to him, hurting her with the fierce passion of his kisses. She put out her hand and ran her fingers slowly, heavily through his dark hair, her heart beating tumultuously, her love for him a consuming fever in her veins.

The next morning, Evelyn Marsh was frankly disappointed at not hearing Paul Markham's voice, brusque, masterful, deep, and resonant, over the telephone. Nor did he call in the afternoon, nor again that evening. Feverishly, restlessly, she paced about the room, her ears strained to the telephone's faintest tinkle.

Ah, but surely he would call up in the morning! He must be made to understand that she would not tolerate his moods, his swift changes from ardent devotion to careless neglect. When he called, she would make her voice frosty, and would let him know beyond the shadow of a doubt how angry she was. She wouldn't be played with in this capricious manner! She found it necessary to steel herself with this thought, fearing that at the first far-off intonation of his voice her words would leap joyously into the mouthpiece. Anything to be free from this intolerable sense of waiting!

There was no word from him on the morrow. Sick with the tension of long hours of nerve-racked waiting, Evelyn seated herself before the telephone, and, with a throbbing in her heart and breast that made her faint and dizzy, called his hotel.

"Mr. Paul Markham? Just a moment, please," she heard the curt voice of the clerk. There was an interminable period of waiting, then the same curt voice: "Not here. Mr. Markham left yesterday. No, he left no forwarding address. Had his baggage sent to the Cunard pier."

Paul gone! Gone without a word to her!

Evelyn sank back limply, her features working convulsively as she abandoned herself to a paroxysm of sobbing. She loved him! Why, she had never had a thought in her mind except Paul since the first moment they met! It was impossible that he should have treated her like this—should have left without even saying goodbye. There must be some mystery, some reason for his sudden departure that he could not explain.

She tried to argue with herself, but deep down in the recesses of her mind the truth

struggled for utterance. She had never quite trusted Paul. She had loved him madly, blindly, foolishly, without ever quite believing him. After all, what did she know of him but that he was a rover, a soldier of fortune, and that she loved him? She threw herself across the bed in utter, abject misery.

She heard the tinkle of the telephone, and instantly leaped to her feet, a wild hope singing in her heart. What if it were Paul? Surely, oh, surely, it must be he! She grasped the instrument frenziedly.

"Miss Marsh speaking. Who is it, please?"

She heard a soft, drawling voice, vaguely familiar—the voice of Ward Nichols. Why, oh, why, couldn't it have been Paul Markham?

No, she didn't want to see Ward Nichols. Bluntly, excitedly, she told him so, and snapped the receiver on its hook with an angry jerk. That sentimental, idealistic, poverty-stricken fool! No, as long as she lived she wanted never to set eyes on him again!

Her mood was bitter, venomous, but she forced herself to dress. She must get away from that room, else she would go mad. She must have something to make her sleep. She couldn't go through the night before her without an anodyne. The thought of facing the long hours of darkness was intolerable.

As she stepped from the elevator, she felt her arm caught in a viselike grip. Turning, she saw at her side Ward Nichols, his thin face cold and hard and determined. There was no escaping the strength of that clasp upon her arm as he led her to a sheltered corner of the big hotel parlor. Not until he had seated himself beside her on the deep-cushioned divan did he once relax his hold. Then he faced her, his eyes steel-gray with anger.

"I haven't come here to tell you of my efforts to find you," he began, speaking slowly, measuring his words. "That would not interest you, nor does it interest me any longer. I made an error in judgment for which I, and I alone, am to blame. We will let that pass. Every man must play the fool once in his life, I suppose. I am not excusing myself or reproaching you."

She said nothing. After all, what was there to say? How soon would this be over? Surely he wouldn't prolong the scene indefinitely! She merely looked

straight ahead of her, her chin outflung contemptuously.

"I have come to you about the jade." He halted, his face mantling with crimson. "I gave it to you in good faith. By rights, of course, it is yours, and I am not an Indian giver. I have heard from Polly Fentress, the girl at the docks in Liverpool. I believe that you were right, and that she does care for me. I was a blind, blundering, ignorant fool not to have known! I would like to give her the amulet, for the sentimental reasons that I mentioned to you."

The jade-green ornament that she had given Paul for luck! Yes, she remembered it very, very well. Still she said nothing, leaving him to flounder along in search of words as best he could.

"I am not asking you for the return of the jade. I am merely making you what I call a fair offer for it. In other words, will you sell it to me? I have refused a hundred thousand dollars for it. I should be glad to pay you that sum, if it would be satisfactory."

One hundred thousand dollars! Evelyn faced him, her eyes wide and staring. A hundred thousand dollars he was offering her for what she had considered worthless—for the trinket that she had given to the man who had made a fool of her!

With a lightning flash she knew that Paul had always known its value. She recalled his eager interest, the gleam in his eyes. It was the jade that had lured him from the first. He had wanted to possess it, not her. The knowledge bit into her consciousness like a blistering acid.

"It is useless to talk further," she said dully. "I haven't the jade. I—I have disposed of it."

His cold glance swept her face.

"You have lied to me once. How do I know that you are telling the truth? Is it that you want more money? It is true that the jade is valuable—centuries old, and very beautiful and rare. Would you consider a larger sum? I have with me the original letter in which I was offered the amount I mentioned by Jules Legrand, a well known collector."

She took the envelope from him, and her hand went rigid in mid-air as she read the address—"Mr. Ward Nichols, president of Nichols & Foster, New York."

"But this isn't yours!" she cried, breathing hard. "Why are you carrying around

that Ward Nichols's mail? Why, he is a rich man—a millionaire!"

Over the man's sunburned face there flashed a look of mingled amazement and disgust.

"The letter is mine. I have had it for some time. It is from Markham, one of Legrand's agents."

"Markham!" Evelyn whispered, and scarcely recognized her own voice.

"Yes—Paul Markham. In my opinion he is one of the best-informed experts in the world. He is Legrand's right-hand man. Possibly you saw him on the boat—a tall, dark man. He was pointed out to me, but I do not know him personally. In some way or other—it is useless to attempt to unravel Legrand's methods—possibly through the shop in Peking, he learned that I had the jade. Legrand's agents have been at my heels ever since. I am only telling you this that you may know that I am dealing fairly with you, that I am submitting to you the figures of a world-famed appraiser." He hesitated for a moment. "I want you to know," he went on, "that I—that I find the situation somewhat embarrassing."

A surge of bitter memories swept through Evelyn's mind, followed by a sickening realization of the present.

"I haven't the jade," she said. "I cannot even tell you where it is."

Her lips felt dry and stiff as she uttered the words. Nervously she fumbled at the envelope in her lap.

Angry and excited as he was, Ward saw that the girl before him was utterly spent, on the verge of collapse.

"I suppose some man has it?" he asked more quietly.

She nodded, one hand clutching at the lace of her dress convulsively. There was suffering in every line of the tear-stained face that she raised to his.

"Yes. I am sorry I cannot give you the jade. Will you believe me when I tell you that I had no idea of its value?"

"Perhaps it is just as well, then, that it is gone. After all, the jade has worked its miracle. The old prophecy has come true, and it has opened the eyes of the blind. It has brought me to a realization of the fact that there could be for me no other woman than Polly Fentress."

He rose, hat in hand. Yielding to an impulse partially kind, partially ironic, he said to the beautiful woman before him:

"May I hope that in your case it will reunite parted lovers."

Instantly he regretted the words, as Evelyn's soul, stripped bare of artifice, pierced through and through with sorrow and regret, looked out at him from her

haunted eyes. Without a backward glance he turned and left her.

For a moment she stared into space with unseeing eyes. Then, reaching for her silver vanity, mechanically she began to powder her nose.

Man Dear

A CURIOUS MISUNDERSTANDING ABOUT THE LOVE MESSAGE THAT MARY DUNN SENT FORTH ON HER TWENTIETH BIRTHDAY

By Cyril B. Egan

SHE was mad for a man; and yet, mad as she was, she would not be easily contented. There were oafs of the village who had cast sheep's eyes at her, and who would gladly have given their labor and love to her for the rest of their lives; but she would have none of them. She had ideas and ideals of her own—romantic ideas and ideals bred of the story books which her mother had forbidden her to read.

"A fine pack of lies you'd be reading!" the latter would say, as she took the book from her daughter's hands to cast it into a roaring peat fire. "The devil's nonsense you're busying yourself with, when you ought to be thinking of wedding with one of the lads of the village! It's soon you will be getting old, and the lads will not look sidewise at you!"

Then the good old woman would go off into the corner to have an uproarious cry over this most unnatural daughter, who, even when arrangements had been completed for her to marry that most eligible bachelor, Michael O'Dougherty, had so kicked up her heels before the young man that he had taken the next boat for America, declaring that he would rather marry the devil's daughter herself in the deepest pocket of hell.

And yet the unnatural maiden was mad for a man. She wanted her man seasoned with romance, and that was a seasoning

which these plodding and unimaginative plowboys could not bring to the match.

Mary was getting old, certainly. As her mother warned her again and again, she was perilously near the shelf. In a couple of years, if she didn't watch sharp, she would be on it, for she was nearly a decrepit twenty.

On her twentieth birthday Mary Dunn broke down and cried. Her latest paper-covered novel, surreptitiously read, had failed to afford her consolation. These print and paper wooings were all right, but they weren't real. She felt lonely—terribly lonely. It would have been all right if she could have confided her feelings to some one, but there was not a person within miles of this strange girl who did not already think her slightly daft.

Now it had long been Mary's custom, when in distress, to write letters of a confidential nature to an imaginary but sympathetic friend in a far-off city. So, sitting on her bed, with her novel closed on her knees, and a piece of paper spread on the back of the book, she took out a pencil and began to scribble a few birthday wishes to her intangible confidante:

It's not that I'm choicely, but I can't abide the lads in this village. Oh, I do, *do* want a man; but I want a polite man—one that has a civil tongue in his head. I want a man strong as a lion with others, but gentle as a lamb with myself. I want a masterful man, who will never let on that he's master. I want to be owned entirely, but I don't

want to be treated like property. I want a pretty man, with pleasant, palavering ways about him, and with soothing stories to tell me about far countries.

Oh, I do, *do* want a man; but I pray the Lord to send me a handsome, daring, devil-may-care darling. If he's all of these things, I don't care where he comes from, or whether he has a second shirt to his back, or has a penny to throw at a cat, I'll marry him in the morning.

Affectionately yours,

MARY DUNN.

Now when the girl had penned the note, she thought how foolish it was to be writing a letter and not posting it; and on the heels of that thought, something wild popped into her mind.

"Oh, would it not be fun?" said she, clapping her hands and jumping up from the bed.

She ran into the kitchen and got herself an empty bottle. She ran back to her room and penned a postscript to the note. She stuffed the note, postscript and all, into the bottle. Then she corked the bottle, and, after scampering with it madly a mile from her house, she pitched the thing into the roaring sea.

This is what the postscript said:

I'll marry the man who brings back this bottle.—MARY DUNN, Kilgannon, Ireland.

It was a very foolish thing to do; but then a girl who thinks herself nearing the shelf on her twentieth birthday is the easiest sort of a mark for the pranks of folly.

II

THERE is no place more prosaic than Atlantic Beach in late October. There is no place more drably gray, more foolishly futile. It lies like a discarded tinsel toy, paint-blistered from the sun, tin-rusted from the rains. The wind howls through the carrouseis, and the sparrows fly about the hot dog stands, poking piteously for the crumbs and skins of summer. Certainly there is no other place in which the spirit of romance, adventure, or poetry is more completely dead.

Calverly liked to do unusual things, and that is why he came to Atlantic Beach in late October. He thought it would be novel to take a swim there. Cold water didn't daunt him; so he set out toward the shore, his blood coursing through his veins and his nerves tingling pleasantly at the anticipatory thrill.

When he actually viewed the chilly vista, however, the heart was frozen within him.

He could picture himself breaking the ice on a wintry woodland pool with never a thought of goose flesh; but the chill of the unseasonable seascape went deeper than the flesh or the marrow—it penetrated a man's very soul. He buttoned his coat more tightly about him, deciding that instead of taking a swim, he would stroll a while beside this bleak waste of waters.

"Poetry is dead," he said moodily to himself. "Romance is dead, adventure is dead. The laboring mountains bear ridiculous mustard advertisements. Even the ocean is converted into a more seemly kind of sewer—a giant liquid canister for the débris of two continents. Lord, I would sail a hundred leagues to get out of the humdrum rut of things! I would walk a mile, or a thousand miles, for a real, unusual, unprecedented, multicolorous, Arabian Nights adventure!"

He turned, put his hands on his hips, and looked disgustedly at the leaden ocean, which had proved such a sad disappointment to him. As if in answer to his look, a great angry wave broke, rolled almost to his feet, and then receded, leaving on the sands, within a yard of him, a tall quart bottle.

Calverly poked at the thing with his walking stick.

"Now, if there was something to drink in this!"

To test the remote possibility of the presence of alcohol, he picked the bottle up, but the heft of it proved it empty. Curious, he pulled the cork, to sniff the quality of the quondam contents, when a piece of paper in the neck of the thing caught his eye.

"Well, I'll be damned!"

Down went his fingers into the neck. It was no time until the note was spread between his hands, and he was reading each succeeding line with increasing interest:

I do, *do* want a man—a polite man—a pretty man—a handsome, daring, devil-may-care darling. I don't care where he comes from. I'll marry the man who brings back this bottle.

Now Calverly had read hundreds of matrimonial advertisements, and had been unmoved by any emotion save that of mirth; but this hymeneal invitation was different. There was a note of wistfulness about it that appealed to him—a note of the adventurous and reckless spirit that he so much admired.

Here, surely, was a kindred soul. He might explore the globe and fail to find her like. Here was an avenue of escape from the deadly path of routine existence. He might travel along that path all his life and fail to find another such exit. Here was a challenge to his gambling, play-a-long-shot nature—a challenge from the deep. Should he ignore it?

Calverly, too, was a lucky lad, noted—and sometimes suspected—as a man with a talent for pulling the right thing out of the grab bag. It was his belief that once in time a masterpiece may be achieved by tossing the alphabet higgledy-piggledy out of a hat; also he believed himself the kind of man to have that kind of luck.

That is why—possessing, as he did, the means and the mood for a vacation of novelty, uncertainty, and whimsical adventure—Charlie Calverly took the next boat for Ireland.

III

"You know, Mary, you are twenty-five now!"

"Well, and what of it?"

"Well, a girl of twenty-five isn't young any more. With a fine man like Miles to offer you marriage, I'm sure you are a fool to refuse it—aren't you now?"

"But, auntie, I don't want Miles!"

As the two of them sat at the table over a pot of tea, they argued the question back and forth. Big Aunt—so distinguished because there were two of her Christian name standing in the same relationship to Mary—was all comprehension and sympathy. Hadn't she shown herself the understandingest person ever since she had seen the child's mother die, and herself had taken over the reins of the household?

"Well, there's something in that. Still, the loneliness is a terrible thing."

"Oh, I do, *do* want a man," protested Mary; "but I don't want any or every man!"

"And have you tried praying to St. Joseph? He knows where they grow fine husbands."

"Oh, I've tried St. Joseph and St. Anthony and all the saints of the calendar, but they're not doing me a bit of good!"

"Ah-h-h!" Big Aunt gave a little cry of compassion. "You can't tell, dear," she consoled, "but it may all be an act of Providence. Still, if a man is good, it's well to be sensible in the matter, and—"

"Oh, I don't want to be sensible!"

"Ah-h-h-h!"

Again the cry of compassion. If it had been Mary's own self crying pity, the utterance could not have been more sympathetic; for they were as alike, these two, as if the one had been the other's daughter.

Both were tall, with a whimsical, paradoxical kind of grace, which in others might be called ungainliness. Both were slender and dark-eyed. Both were dark-haired, for the aunt was one of those astonishingly young old women whose hair shows but an occasional thread of gray. Both were capable of the playfulness of spring kittens, or of the madness of March hares. Both were women of the softie eye, and had a soothing way about them with the men; for Big Aunt, though she had always remained maiden, had never shown a sign of becoming spinster. Oh, they were very alike, Mary and her aunt, even in the passionate fondness each of them displayed for the literature of sentiment.

"But I tell you, my dear," the latter was saying, "you will learn, in time, it's the goodness that counts, and it's the loneliness that hurts. If you can get a good man, you might as well be sensible. Glory be to God, there's somebody at the gate!"

The somebody at the gate was Charlie Calverly. He had a cat in his arms. He wanted to know had the Dunns lost a cat; and if they hadn't lost a cat, would it be troubling them at all to be letting him rest his bones on the doorstep?

IV

CALVERLY thought it a curious coincidence that he should come to Ireland intending, if possible, to fall in love with a girl, and then that he should find this grab-bag *inamorata* altogether lovable.

Again, he thought it odd that a lady who would play an oceanic lottery to get a man should—when the man had appeared, and had paid such persistent attentions to her—show herself so indecisive in accepting his love. Mary's charm attracted him; her arm's length attitude piqued him. Even if he had had no love for her, he would have been goaded to the pursuit by reason of the elusiveness of the quarry; for the sight of a fugitive ever invites pursuit, whether it be from the single man or the motley mob. It was the hunt, the game, and the gamble that interested Calverly more than anything else in life.

Oh, many a time indeed, when the outcome seemed all too dubious, Calverly thought of producing the much-traveled note as a climactic persuader to capture; but his sporting instinct revolted at that. He would win Mary Dunn on his own merits, and would not exhibit the invitation to the conquest until the conquest had been achieved. He reflected, too, that some years must have elapsed since the bottle had passed from continent to continent. Years would certainly bring a change in the girl's disposition. Possibly she was not now so greedy for a man. Lord knows, she held herself independently enough!

For three months, then, Calverly wooed Mary with ardor and devotion. He did everything to live up to her ideal of a man. He showed himself to be a pretty man, a civil man, a pleasant man, a daring man. He did her a deed of valor, riding bareback at the fair on a nasty little neck-breaking stallion. He surpassed himself and everybody else in all the rural arts. He played a fiddle that would charm the rats out of Hamelin and the snakes out of Ireland. He jigged a jig that for vigor and grace would put to blush the most talented clodhoppers the community had to offer.

Moreover, he charmed the heart of his lady with moving tales of deeds done by flood or field. Again, there were other tales he told her which would drive almost any girl, save this one that he wooed, irresistibly and permanently into his arms.

Yet, at the end of three months, Mary did not know her mind—did not know whether she wanted him or not.

"Have him!" said her aunt one day, over a confessional pot of tea. "He's everything a man ought to be."

"I'll not," said the girl, with a defiant toss of her head. "What is he to me?"

"You are a little fool," said the aunt calmly. "You deserve to get a man like Miles O'Brien, and have him make you miserable for life!"

"Why, auntie, 'twas yourself who told me three months ago to take Miles!"

"Tut! That was before the coming of darling Charlie. Mary, where are the eyes in your head? Now whatever can you be thinking?"

"I'm thinking that Miles is not so bad."

"But the night-and-day difference between the two of them! Here's Miles O'Brien, as dull and dreary as dirty dishwater; and here's Charlie Calverly, as love-

ly a lad as ever stepped out of a fairy tale. What ails you, child? Have you gone mad entirely? Now I'm asking you, isn't Charlie everything a girl's heart could want?"

In sore distress, Mary shook her head from side to side, and threw up her hands.

"That's the trouble—he is everything a girl could want. He is like a lad stepped out of a fairy tale. He's too perfect. Sure I could never feel that he belonged to me! Oh, I have such a terrible fight going on about him inside of me! I say to myself that he's everything that's right. I love him for being so perfect, and then I hate him for it, and I say to myself that he's everything that's wrong. Oh, have I not a terrible time of it? I keep fighting and fighting the notion of him. 'No one can love you so sweetly as this lad,' says the notion. 'But he's never the lad for me,' I say to the notion. Oh, I don't know why, but I keep thinking to myself that maybe he's for somebody else, but he's never the lad for me!"

Mary put her arms on the table, took her head between her hands, and burst into tears. When the storm had subsided, she looked up calmly and said:

"I met Miles by the turnpike this morning. He said he wanted to come and see me again. I might as well be sensible. I can't be having the heart torn out of me with doubt any longer. I think, when Miles comes and asks me again to marry him, I'll tell him yes."

That night, when Miles came, Big Aunt was at the door to greet him. She spoke to him in an unusually loud tone of voice—so loud that even Mary, off in her room, heard every word. The loudness was a protest of candor and authority—two qualities which were sadly lacking in this particular speech:

"Glory be to God, are you here again, Miles O'Brien? Sure you are wasting your time coming here! Mary Dunn means nothing by you, and I think it's only fairness to let you know she doesn't. Sure she told me this morning she's going to marry Charlie Calverly. There, there, don't look so cross and ugly! Aren't there plenty of good fish in the sea?"

"I heard every word you said," hotly exclaimed Mary, rushing out of her room as soon as Big Aunt had shut the door on the disconsolate Miles. "The only reason I did not come out sooner is that I didn't

want to make a show of you; but I'll see Miles, and I'll tell him all about this. No one is going to make up my mind for me but myself. I'm going to tell Miles I'll marry him in the morning!"

She started for the door, as if to fly after the discarded suitor.

"Mary!" The voice of Big Aunt was low-pitched but compelling. There was, too, something hypnotic in her eye as she stared at her distracted niece. "Sit down, child. Now tell me"—she took the girl by the hand—"which one of these men do you really love?"

"Why—er—er," replied Mary, trembling, "I don't know!"

"Oh, but you do know! Now think hard—which one?"

She gripped the girl's hand.

"Now, auntie, why will you torment me? I've told you again and again that I don't know."

"Oh, but you do know! Which one, now?"

"Why"—the words struggled to come out, and finally they came, with a flood of tears and with all the violence of a long suppressed shout—"why, it's Charlie, of course, that I love!"

"And why won't you have him?"

"Well, there's every reason why I should have him, and yet there's a feeling in me that fights all these reasons—fights them, oh, so hard!"

Big Aunt took a seat beside the anguished girl, and, stroking her hands, bespoke her softly, coaxingly:

"Child, you'll be having Charlie Calverly, surely?"

After a little while came the girl's reply, faint as the voice of the vanquished, yet inflected hopefully, like the utterance of one who sees in defeat a victory:

"Yes, I'll be having him. Surely, I'll be having him."

"You'll never regret it. He's the loveliest lad!"

"Auntie"—the girl leaned forward, her eyes mischievously twinkling—"I think you're in love with Charlie yourself!"

"Go along with you, Mary!"

And in jocose reproof, Big Aunt whacked her niece on the knee.

V

It was a great betrothal feast they had.

There were only three of them at the feast, but there was fun enough for a hun-

dred. For the occasion, a juicy little porker had been slain and stuffed and roasted, and an apple put in its mouth. There were mugs of porter, and there were crisp little cakes baked with loving care by Big Aunt.

At the end of the feast there was a speech by Calverly. First Charlie gallantly kissed the bride-to-be, who glowed at the salutation like a rose at the dawning. Yes, she was sure now. All her doubt was gone—this was the man for her! Then Charlie reached below his chair, brought up a bottle, and placed it grandly on the table.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" he said, rising from his seat in the magnificent manner of one addressing a multitude. "To crown this feast I have brought a bottle—a rare bottle, a bottle of a most exotic vintage, a bottle of stuff that goes to man's head, giving him the wildest and loveliest dream—a bottle whose contents go to a man's legs, giving him the power to jump from continent to continent in quest of the dream. Now that an ocean has been spanned, and the dream has been realized, let us inspect, ladies and gentlemen, the dynamic but delectable cause thereof!"

Calverly took the bottle into his hands and pulled out the cork with a loud pop.

"A note for you, my dear," he said, delivering the missive from the neck of the bottle into Mary's hands.

"A note for me?"

The girl took the paper from him, with a puzzled but happy smile on her face. Charlie was always up to some joke or other, and she would know the meaning of this one presently. Wasn't he the darlingest playboy?

Then she began to read, her *fiancé* watching her countenance closely for the dawn of recognition and remembrance.

"Don't you remember?" he urged, when he had seen her read with ever increasing mystification into the body of the missive. "Surely," he pleaded, "you can't have forgotten it!"

She held up her hand as if to say:

"Hold your horses a minute, Charlie Calverly. I'm interested in this note, even if I'm not enlightened by it!"

She read on. The faces of the trio at the table were a pretty study in puzzlement.

"Surely now!" said Calverly in a coaxing tone, when the girl had finished, had shaken her head, and was folding up the paper. "Surely—"

He held out his hands, but he could not complete the sentence. Mary was completing it for him.

"I—don't—understand," she said slowly. "For the life of me, I—"

"Now glory be to God!" interposed Big Aunt, giving the table a hearty thump. "What are the pair of you driving at? Mary, let me look at that paper. I may, mayn't I, Charlie?"

Charlie, who was trying to orient himself in a new and entirely unforeseen set of circumstances, didn't care whether she read the note or not. So, like a man in a dream, he took the paper from the niece to hand it to the aunt.

"Well, now—where are my spectacles? Wherever are my spectacles?"

Big Aunt, once she had smoothed the paper between her hands, went poking and peering everywhere for her glasses—into all her apron pockets, over and under the table—only to remember, as her hand went to her forehead, that she had had them on her all the time.

"Dear me!" she sighed. "How could I have forgotten?"

Then she settled back in her chair to peruse the letter.

"It's not that I'm choicely," she began aloud, "'but I can't abide the lads in this village.' Humph! Now where have I heard that before? 'Oh, I do, *do* want—I

do, do want—I do, *do* want—'" Suddenly Big Aunt broke off. "Glory be to God!" she cried, and read the rest of the letter in silence.

When she had finished, she quietly put the letter in her apron pocket, pushed her glasses back on her forehead, and folded her hands in her lap.

"It's a queer, brass-faced letter," she said, "for a decent-minded girl to be writing!" Two little devils danced in her great black eyes. "I dunno," she said, "but that a brazen strap like that oughtn't to be read out off of the altar and excommunicated from the church!" She rocked to and fro with unholy joy. "Come here to me, Charlie!" she cried, and beckoned to him. "Isn't it the custom for nephews-in-law intended to kiss their aunts-in-law intended?"

Chivalrous, though dumfounded, Charlie rose to the situation. Big Aunt rose also, threw her arms about the boy, and kissed him with an ardent and resounding smack altogether uncalled for from a lady of her advanced years.

"It was sweet of you to come, Charlie," she murmured, putting her head to one side and regarding him wistfully, tenderly; "but, you bad boy," she chided, giving him a playful push in the direction of her niece, "go along with you! *You're forty years too late!*"

A JAR OF ROSE LEAVES

THE rose has left the garden;
Here she but faintly lives—
Lives but for me,
Within this little urn of potpourri
Of all that was
And never more can be,
While the blackberries harden
On the wind-shaken tree.
Yet if my song a little fragrance gives,
'Tis not all loss;
Something I save
From the sweet grave
Wherein she lies—
Something she gave
That never dies—
Something that still may live
In these my words,
That drew from her their breath,
And fain would be her birds
Still in her death.

Richard Leigh

The Street of Broken Men

THE STRANGE STORY OF MRS. COONEY'S LODGING HOUSE
AND OF THE DAUGHTER WHOM ITS SHABBY
INMATES ADOPTED

By John D. Swain

BEHOLD how the coldly statistical American Bankers Association inadvertently lapses into sheer drama. In one of its compilations it depicts the careers of one hundred young and vigorous men from the age of twenty-five. At the age of forty-five, sixty-five of the one hundred men will be barely self-supporting. At fifty-five, thirty of them will have died; and of the remaining seventy, sixty-one will be wholly dependent upon children, relatives, or charity. Of the one hundred original "average men," ninety-four will die penniless.

Your city has its Street of Broken Men, and so has mine. The street's patent of ignobility will be found in numerous stained and grimy cards leering from front window or attached to melancholy door:

ROOMS TO LET

In Boston, the broken men dwell on the crest of a truncated hill. Below them, on one side, are haughty streets still largely populated by descendants of the builders of the great square-pillared or swell-front mansions shaded by mighty elms and chestnuts, with fascinating little gardens in the rear, accessible by brick tunnels guarded by iron grills. On the other slope of the hill are the crowded tenements of a polyglot tribe, survivors of the various races which, during the past hundred years or so, have successively swept over the region, held it for a time against all comers, and then passed on.

From time to time a recruit comes to the Street of Broken Men from the aristocratic southern slope. Much oftener, a broken man slips down the sordid northern slope, to return no more. His neighbors are Russian Jews, Italians, negroes. They despise

him, and he lives and dies an alien in his home town.

The Street of Broken Men is not uncheerful. It has seen better days. It has known periwigs and coaches with gilded wheels, fashionable routs and liveried servants. Here and there thrive ailanthus trees planted by old merchant mariners in front of their red brick, ivy-covered homes on whose battered eight-paneled doors hang tarnished brass knockers. There are not a few lovely fanlights, some violet panes remain unbroken in window frames, and hidden away inside are some wonderful Macyntire panelings and carved mantels.

The first warm days of spring bring groups of students from the schools of art and architecture to make sketches of some unspoiled vista or some Colonial detail; but the old families have gone, the houses are leased to landladies or for petty commerce, and the street is populated, not by residents, but by lodgers. It is pervaded by an apologetic "we are only here for a time" air. Men—and women—come and go. As individuals, they change constantly. As types, they persist.

The little shops reflect the life of the quarter—a dairy lunch, a one-day laundry, a tobacco store, a cheap tailor's establishment. An old coal cellar has been converted into an eating place serving fifty-cent dinners and selling tickets, three dollars' worth for two dollars and a half. There are two or three houses still occupied by their owners, and these protect themselves against a ceaseless jangle of doorbells by an arrogant sign:

WE DO NOT TAKE LODGERS

There are also one or two attic studios of struggling artists, and a coffee house en-

tered through a melancholy yard guarded by a purple gate, lighted by paraffin candles, and serving very tough waffles drenched in synthetic maple sirup. Few of the lodgers can afford to pay the price demanded, and the patrons are mostly Harvard students, manicures, plain-clothes men, and undismayed seekers of thrills. Bohemianism does not thrive in the Street of Broken Men.

It is a street almost lacking in children. Possibly for this reason it abounds in stray cats. Little excitement enlivens its drab life. There is an occasional chimney fire, the arrival of the apparatus drawing hordes of children from the tenement slopes below; and every now and then there is a lodging house funeral, which fetches heads from all the neighboring windows. For a brief time Mrs. Lane's or Miss Petersen's lodging house is clothed with a little distinction. A long and very shiny black car is parked before it. Its sign announcing "rooms to let" is hauled down. A handful of faded flowers is fastened to the front door by a soiled purple ribbon.

Within, the invariable smell of boiled cabbage is for an hour or so blended with that of calla lilies. Shuffling feet are heard. The gabble of comment at adjoining windows ceases. Then the long, shiny car speeds away, the rooming sign reappears, and life on the Street of Broken Men goes on as before.

Who are they—these broken men? Consult once more the coldly inevitable statistics of the American Bankers Association. They are you, and I, and our friends—unless we have been lucky gamblers in life; unless we are one of the four or five out of every hundred who have made good.

They are neither bums nor crooks, these broken men living on the street that lies along the crest of a Boston hill. Neither are they penniless; for they live in decent lodgings and pay their rent regularly, or nearly so. Most of them work, after a fashion. They are not lazy, but they are dispirited, and a bit frightened. None of them has any hope whatever of climbing over the slope to one of the sleeker, more expensive streets; but each has a secret terror of slipping down the other side of the hill and dying an outcast among foreigners. The very best that they can hope for is to hang on where they are, until their time comes and they are buried from Miss Petersen's or Mrs. Lane's lodging house.

Let us pull a doorknob, push a button, or sound a knocker, at a venture. We are now standing at the foot of four worn brownstone steps ornamented with a foot-scraper fashioned of black iron in the shape of a cat. The door contains two hideous panels of yellow and green stained glass, and bears the name "Cooney." There was a time, before the glass panels were let in, when it bore a name better known in American letters; and Longfellow, Hawthorne, Emerson, and Charles Dickens have decorously scraped the mud from their top boots and Congress gaiters, while waiting for it to be opened.

It may surprise you to learn that Mrs. Cooney knows this. She takes a sort of reflected pride in it; and she gets an extra dollar a week for the room with the coal grate before which, she assures you, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" was first read aloud.

Mrs. Cooney shelters quite a flock of broken men. It is well that we, as possible recruits to their ranks, should know them.

In the ebb and flow of transients there is a nucleus of otherwise homeless men, ranging in years from fifty to sixty-five. One of these is big Denny Martin, ex-bar-tender. He could shake a mean cocktail, but he is too self-respecting to take up bootlegging, too old to evolve into a soda jerker. The girls demand some one younger and snappier, with an engaging grin and sealskin hair. Denny is night counter man at the corner lunch, and, as there is little trade there after seven, his cronies make the place their clubroom, where, over mugs of hot coffee, they talk of better days.

The Rev. Elmer Watts prospered reasonably in the era of a stern gospel straight from the shoulder; but later he was shunted from pulpit to pulpit in favor of younger men who could preach popular sermons. He now solicits life insurance. Knowing next to nothing about its intricacies, and unable to compete with the professionals, he is a jackal snatching poor morsels after which the big fellows disdain to go. Now and then he canvasses the hill with a subscription set of books bound in near-sheep, a dollar down and fifty cents a week. He also has a fixed income. His religious denomination gives to all its pastors who have served for fifty years or more an annual pension of three hundred dollars; and this, as the American Bankers know, is a dollar a day, not counting Sundays and holidays.

Mr. Watts is the most prosperous of the broken men.

Randall Cook had kept a livery and sale stable all his life. He knew horses and men and poker, and so he stands for the sporting strain in Mrs. Cooney's menage; but the automobile came, and the horse vanished. Ran was out of business and out of luck. He has a few dollars saved out of the thousands that have slipped through his fingers, and he looks after his landlady's furnace, shovels snow, and does odd jobs of repairing about the house.

Carter is a back-number newspaper man who faded from the journalistic picture about the time when "leg men" began to telephone their stories in, instead of rushing in to pound them out on a typewriter. He exists by soliciting advertising and by borrowing. He is always sure of a square meal when Denny Martin goes on at six o'clock at the corner lunch.

Professor Morosini was once the sonorous lecturer who introduced the freaks and monstrosities at a Bowdoin Square dime museum. A throat affection cost him his voice; and a voice and a remarkable vocabulary being his sole stock in trade, he now exists deviously. A hectic flush of prosperity came to him with the crossword fad, as he had a gift for solving and inventing puzzles of that sort, and he wrote a thin book on which meager royalties are still coming in.

Sam Billings was a famous grainer. With a tin of varnish, two combs, and a rag, he could earn seven or eight dollars a day making a cheap pine door look as if it was quartered from oak. He could imitate and even outdo nature in the reproduction of any foreign or domestic wood; but nobody has wanted a door grained for lo, these many years. Sam does a little painting now and then, but, as he belongs to no union, he has to be sly about it, and he has worn the same suit of clothes for seven successive years.

Finally, that the group should embrace all the arts, sciences, and trades, there is the smallest, meekest, and cheeriest of the lot—Archie Somers, who lives in a large clothes closet made over into a chamber, up in Mrs. Cooney's attic. Archie could do a lot of things, but everything he had learned went wrong. He could attach half soles to boots with wooden pegs, make realistic wax flowers, iron a top hat beautifully, and play lugubriously but quite surpris-

ingly upon the jew's-harp. He now serves as an extra waiter whenever he gets the chance, and owns a shiny black suit and a dickey.

These are the broken men who live in the street where Mrs. Cooney's lodging house stands. None of them has any near relative who is both prosperous and generous. All of them have had their little day when life was worth the living. None are sots, but all are surely headed for institutions of various sorts, and ultimately for the Potter's Field. They are victims of remorseless industrial changes which overtook them at a time when they were too old to adjust themselves, or to learn new trades.

They are as drowned men on the floor of the sea. Over them sweep giant storms whose passions come to their placid depths only as faint stirrings of the listless seaweed among which they lie enmeshed. Far above them sail the glad ships, bound for distant ports on great adventures on which these men will never embark. The turmoil and struggle of a great city is all about them, but touches them not, save as they read their newspapers on a sunny bench on Boston Common.

They go sometimes, singly or in a group, to the Public Library, to free lectures or concerts, and once in awhile to a movie. They even vote; but since they are neither first-nighters nor panhandlers, and are never mentioned in the newspapers, they have no real part in the life of their city. The sands of their bleak lives run out slowly and noiselessly as their shuffling footsteps pass up and down the Street of Broken Men.

II

IN a "square" room—which is Bostonese for a front one—on the second floor of Mrs. Cooney's, Delice La Tour was taking her last curtain call. There was, in fact, no one in the room at the time. The harried doctor, whose precarious lodging house practice did not permit him the luxury of a flivver, had left Miss La Tour an hour before, quite certain in his own mind that he would be called but once more. That final errand would be to certify that his patient had died from natural causes—to wit, a drafty theater and Boston's famous east wind.

Mrs. Cooney, a big-hearted though sour-faced and disillusioned woman, had done

all that the doctor had ordered and that her own sympathy could suggest to make comfortable the heavy mother of the third-rate repertoire company. Her eyes bright with fever, the La Tour sat erect in her tumbled black walnut bed, bowed graciously to the crayon enlargement of the late Mr. Cooney, and blew a series of girlish kisses at his piratically bewhiskered face.

"I thank you—oh, I thank you all!" she gasped.

Then, with the clapping of hundreds of ghostly hands and the "bravos" of many imaginary voices in her ears, she sank slowly back upon the hard, flat pillows and passed smilingly out into the darkness.

In lodging houses, bodies do not lie in state. The efficiency and celerity with which they are whisked away shows what real team work can accomplish. As a lifelong member of road companies playing one-night stands, Delice La Tour had become used to fast work; but even she would have been surprised at the abruptness with which the many grim formalities had been rushed through and herself meanly buried in a weedy part of a suburban cemetery.

No member of her company was present at the services held in the funeral parlors. They were already filling an engagement two hundred miles away, and another actress as fat and mediocre as she was simpering at apathetic audiences. Her effects had brought enough to pay everybody, but the residue of her estate consisted of some ten or twelve dollars in cash, a few cheap trinkets, her tawdry clothes, and a large scrap book pasted full of old press notices and programs.

The broken men of Mrs. Cooney's establishment scarcely knew of the passing of Delice La Tour, save the bare fact that she had come, died, and gone. Professor Morosini had a remarkable memory for old-time players, but he had never heard of her. The Rev. Elmer Watts would have offered her his ghostly counsel, but at the time he had been in Chelsea, selling a richly illustrated volume on "The Jewish Makers of America." Ran Cook had been unlucky enough to be called upon to help hoist the casket down the narrow circular stairway to the front door. Immediately thereafter he hurried down to a little tailor shop on Cambridge Street, and had treated himself to a drink of denatured alcohol and burned sugar. Funerals greatly depressed

the broken men, who visualized in them their own cheerless ends.

On the day after La Tour's square room was put in order, it was rented to a night taxi chauffeur, who slept all day, and whose spirits were not dampened by the crayon enlargement of Mr. Cooney or by any thoughts of the lodger whose successor he was.

In his little cupboard chamber off the attic, Archie Somers was producing remarkable sounds from a large iron jew's-harp clenched firmly in his yellow teeth, and nasally twanged by a not too clean forefinger. In order to obtain the various tones and half tones, Archie altered the size and shape of his oral sounding board; and this caused him to achieve a series of dreadful grimaces, not the least fascinating part of his performance.

It fascinated a lank and rather skinny child who stood just outside his open door in the dusky attic, listening, and watching from black eyes which seemed to occupy nearly half of her pale, oval face. She seemed a rather frowzy child of a possible twelve years, who had outgrown her sleazy silk dress, overtrimmed with frills and pleats and bows and badly in need of sponging and pressing. Upon her feet were absurd little strap pumps with high, wabbling heels so out of true that her prominent ankle bones stuck out through her unmended near-silk stockings.

Presently Archie, raising eyes and brows in a desperate grimace to capture upper C, observed for the first time that he had an audience. He paused in the middle of "What 'll I Do?" and removed the jew's-harp as if it were a badly fitting set of teeth.

"Hello, kid! Like the music?"

The girl removed a soiled finger from her lips, and shook her head.

"That ain't music," she said. "That's only hokum—vaudeville stuff."

"Huh?" Archie blinked at her frankly. "We-ell, you can't get much tone from one of these here things; but they're interesting."

"So's a bearded lady, or a human pin-cushion," agreed the small critic, edging toward the door, her eyes curiously inventing the ingenuities whereby Archie Somers combated poverty.

There was a fireless cooker, which he had made from an old shoe-shine box lined with zinc and asbestos, a gas-jet egg cooker,

and—his proudest device—a nickel-plated water bottle, which on winter nights he filled with scalding coffee, to be used as a footwarmer all night, and as breakfast in bed when he awoke in his bitterly cold perch under the roof.

"Come in," he invited. "Be sociable. Mind if I smoke?" He dumped a pile of magazines from a three-legged chair, and motioned to her to sit down. "Who are you? Niece of Mrs. Cooney's, eh? Haven't seen you around before."

The girl seated herself with a grace not in keeping with her dress or her brusque repartee.

"Smoke up," she urged. "You might offer me a drag. The special brand of imported cigarettes I use has been held up by the customs."

Archie paused with the lighted match halfway to his corn-cob pipe.

"Shucks, you're joking! I'd hate to see a nice little gal like you usin' the filthy weed, as they say; but you haven't told me who you are. Me, I'm Archie. I can do 'most anything so long's it's useless."

"I'm just staying here," the girl said listlessly. "My mother—Delice La Tour—died here last week. They're going to park me in some home, I guess. Gawd, it's tough luck!"

Suddenly she covered her small face with rather big, bony hands, leaned forward, and began to rock back and forth, while little salty trickles oozed between her fingers to add to the many spots on her dress.

Archie's wrinkled face took on a look of deep concern. He carefully laid his pipe on a slab of cheese, leaned forward impulsively, and gathered the disconsolate waif into his meager lap. She was almost as large as he, and her long legs dangled on the floor; but she relaxed on the little man's shoulder, her sobs gradually giving way to deep sighs. With disconcerting suddenness, she sat up.

"I got a violin," she announced.

"You don't tell me! And can you play on it?"

"Well, I don't lug it around for an ornament. Wait! I'll go get it."

She was out of his lap, and out of the room, as swiftly as a humming bird. Her high heels clattered down the stairs, a door slammed, and in a couple of minutes she was back, toting a battered fiddle. She twanged the strings, tuning it dexterously;

then, tightening the bow and setting the violin beneath a determined little chin, she swung into "Souvenir."

With her eyes fixed on Archie's for signs of approbation, she followed up with "Mother Machree," "The Rosary," and the jazz favorite of the moment. Her ear was true. She didn't sharp or flat, Archie took note. Her bowing was crude, yet oddly assured. She had droll mannerisms, and didn't fear to take liberties with her score.

He was no critic, though he knew more about music than any of the rest of the broken men; but he gathered that here was a queer little genius who had a natural gift for the violin, and who had never had any proper instruction. The instrument itself seemed to possess remarkable tone, he thought.

"Where'd you get it?" he asked, after he had warmly praised her.

But the origin of the violin was as obscure as that of the little Delice herself. During forty odd hectic years her mother had accumulated many souvenirs—among them two or three shadowy husbands. Delice was not certain which one, if any, was her parent. Probably it might have been the owner of the violin, as one of Delice's mates had been an Italian music teacher, a cabaret tenor, and the leader of a petty orchestra.

She herself had covered some fifty thousand miles during her twelve years, and had somehow learned to write and to read, mostly theatrical papers and lurid serials. She could jabber a little French and Italian, knew all there was to know about cheap hotels, and was shockingly wise and pitifully ignorant. She had never played much with other children, but had occasionally been cast for some child part in a melodrama. She could do acrobatic dancing, and had never been to church but twice. Lacking relatives or money, Mrs. Cooney was looking after her until the slow-turning wheels of charity should grind her up into anonymous fodder for some one of the dozen children's institutions to which she was eligible.

Indeed, Mrs. Cooney's strident voice arose even now from the basement, wafted aloft on a cloud of incense from her boiled dinner.

"I got to go feed my face," Delice declared. "You're a regular guy, Archie! I'm pleased to 'a' metcha."

She retired backward with a not ungrace-

ful curtsy, her violin clutched in one hand, her bow in the other.

"Now, ain't that hell?" he mused. "Smart as a steel trap, that kid! No father or mother or nothin'; and they'll take her some place, put a uniform on her, and make a cook or a nurse or mebbe a typewriter out o' her, and she'll be just like a million others. Shucks!"

He filled his little cubicle with clouds of burning cut plug. When darkness came, he rose, clapped on his hat, and went down to the corner lunch.

III

THE supper rush was over when Archie Somers entered the little room. The clerks from the State House and the down town shops who lived near by on the hill—two score regulars, in all—had eaten and gone. From now until closing time at ten there would be only stragglers—only these, and the broken men who had nowhere else to go, and who made the place their club, with big Denny Martin as steward.

Denny was busy at the coffee urn now, drawing cans of boiling water from the faucet and pouring it into the top of the urn and through the cloth sack of ground coffee—two pounds to five gallons. The coffee Denny served wouldn't keep any one awake. You could drink two or three mugs of it, and go straight to bed and to sleep. All the rest of Mrs. Cooney's nondescript males were lounging at one of the two tables, waiting for the supply to be replenished after the regulars had emptied the shiny nickel urn.

Professor Morosini was lighting a dry cigar, after his trained tongue had licked it, to plug the worst of its many leaks. A sign on the wall read "No Smoking Allowed," but the rule was never enforced at night.

The broken men were eating hamburgers, sandwiches, egg salads, and beef stews, when Archie entered. The very way in which he gave his own order showed that he was excited about something. He already owed Denny more than four dollars; but he glibly commanded a Great Western, shrimp salad, sliced pineapple, and coffee. Denny's bushy gray eyebrows rose inquiringly, and silence fell upon the group.

"Must have inherited property," drawled Ran Cook, wiping his chin with a paper napkin. "Prob'ly he'll set up the cigars. Mine's a Golden Wedding perfecto."

"Aw right, Denny—cigars all around! Chalk 'em up on the slate." Archie bore his heaped tray to the table, wet his whistle with a swallow of coffee and beamed upon his fellows. "Listen, you old has-beens! I got a new scheme!"

A slight chill enfolded the group. Archie's schemes were never profitable, even to himself.

"You ought to take out some accident insurance," observed the Rev. Mr. Watts. "We have a new blanket policy covering loss of—"

Archie interrupted him hurriedly.

"This scheme's different," he explained.

"It ain't a money making investment."

"None of yours is," Ran Cook reminded him.

Archie ignored the implication.

"Here's us, a lot of old fossils with no real interests in life, just markin' time, waiting for the bone yard to claim us. Now you'll all agree with me that there's plenty talent in this bunch. What's lacking, I asks? Why, as I see it, it's—er—incentive. It's ambition. We got no wives to spur us on, no young ones to raise. Well, I've found us an incentive!"

There was an awkward pause. It was Carter, the old newspaper man, who broke the ensuing silence.

"Do I get you right? You've found some wives and young ones to help us pass away the time, and enliven our declining years?"

Archie shook his head, scattering crumbs of Spanish onion and bread right and left.

"I got a little girl—from the theater," he announced.

Carter nodded.

"I see! Archie's got himself involved with a chorus girl from the Old Howard, and he aims to take her out and show her a real time. He calls it an *incentive*, but it's only a touch!"

Archie looked hurt.

"That's just like a lot of bone-headed, hard-hearted old relics! I s'pose you don't even know we had a death in the house last week?"

"I know," Ran Cook said. "An actress. Helped carry her coffin downstairs. My back's hurt me ever since."

"Well, she left a little girl, about twelve years old, I guess. Mrs. Cooney's keeping her a few days till the charities come and get her; and I say it's a darned shame! The kid's got real musical talent."

"What for? The jew's-harp?" asked Cook.

"Nope—violin. They'll probably take it away from her and sell it. You got to go clean to an institution—you all know that. They go through you like stick-up men—take even your clothes, and put you into a uniform."

"Well, what's the idea? What you want us to do about it?"

Archie pushed aside his empty dishes, and lighted one of the cigars Big Denny brought.

"That's what I'm trying to explain. I want to save that kid from being put into a home. It's all right to put old ruins like us there, but it's tough on a little girl to have to grow up in one. She'd be happy at Mrs. Cooney's. Wouldn't cost nothing to speak of, and 'twould give us something to live for. We could have a good influence over her, too."

Sam Billings made a sort of choking sound; but the Rev. Elmer Watts straightened up.

"The idea does you honor," he declared. "Has the child had proper religious instruction?"

"Not judging by her language. She hasn't even got proper clothes or shoes. Don't know who her father was, and there's no relatives to interfere."

"That's encouragin'," agreed Ran Cook. "Just what did you aim to do?"

"Well, it was my notion to get Mrs. Cooney to room and board her. The little alcove on the second floor has been vacant a long time. It's only two dollars a week, and I guess Mrs. Cooney 'd let her have it for a dollar and a half. She wouldn't eat much. She's little, and skinny."

"Little skinny folks eat like prize hogs," Big Denny observed. "Look at yourself, Archie!"

Archie paid no attention to the thrust.

"And she'd go to public school, of course. That wouldn't cost us nothing; but she ought to have violin lessons."

"Couldn't you undertake to learn her?" Professor Morosini inquired with polite sarcasm.

"Well, I could help some on the general theory of music, of course; but I don't know much about the technic of stringed instruments. I'm better grounded on wind."

"We'll say you are!"

Archie continued undaunted.

"First of all, we need a little pot to get her some decent clothes. She looks like something in a show—which she was. We need to pay her board for a week or two in advance, too. I'd be willing to act as treasurer."

The Rev. Mr. Watts interposed hastily.

"If we go into this thing, we mustn't let you bear the whole burden. Some one with business training should handle the funds, if any."

"Suit yourselves, parson. All I want is to do right by the child, and to give us an incentive—to make our lives count for something. It would be—er—stimulating! My notion is to take up a little collection, right now and here. Let Denny hold it. I'll fix up with Mrs. Cooney about looking after the girl, and picking out her clothes. What say?"

The Rev. Mr. Watts was temporarily affluent, for him. He had disposed of a dozen subscription sets in Chelsea, and several dollars in change jingled in the right-hand pocket of his shiny black pants. He thrust a thin white hand into them, and produced a silver dollar.

"It appears to me a most worthy cause," he stated.

Sam Billings contributed another dollar, received that very afternoon for repainting a cobbler's signboard. The others chipped in without protest—all save Archie Somers himself.

"I'll check, till to-morrow," he explained. "Got a job at a banquet to-night ought to be good for a fiver."

The little heap of coins footed up to four dollars and nineteen cents. Big Denny shook his head.

"Tain't enough. Move everybody double his subscription!"

"Second the motion," said Archie, who hadn't contributed a dime.

The rest came across, and Archie added his I.O.U. for two dollars. Big Denny swept up the pot and put it into an empty condensed milk can.

"Well, that's that!" sighed Archie. "I'll fix it up with the missus, and I'll tell Delice she's adopted."

"There ought to be a story in it," mused Carter. "I'll see if I can't get a write-up in the *Bulletin*, with a cut of the girl. Sob stuff—old, broken-down geezers adopt waif—musical prodigy found in Boston lodging house. It ought to be worth a tenspot. I'll go fifty-fifty with the kid."

Thus came a new element to enliven the drab length of the Street of Broken Men.

IV

A PSYCHOLOGIST once observed that one thing leads to another. The difficulties of our enterprises are hidden from us when we take the first confident step. Otherwise, many noble emprises would die a borning.

When the broken men so lightly assumed the responsibilities of a synthetic fatherhood, no qualms disturbed them. The first steps were disarming in their ease. Mrs. Cooney readily agreed to look after the little orphan, and to outfit her in more suitable and enduring garments than the La Tour had fancied. She could hardly refuse, for the money was put in her hand by Denny Martin.

In the goodness of her heart the landlady would have gone further. She offered to stand her share of the expenses; but this offer was unanimously rejected when the men gathered next night at the dairy lunch. Professor Morosini voiced the feelings of all in the matter.

"The girl needs a background of strong character," he said. "If we let Mrs. Cooney into this thing, first we know she'll be running the whole show, and we'll not have a word to say as to the child's bringing up. She's run wild, and the influence of sane, well poised men like us is what she needs."

Not a broken man could question such a sound view. Each mentally reviewed his own qualifications, and found them entirely adequate.

"Thank God the waif has fallen into such good hands!" breathed the Rev. Mr. Watts.

If nobody said "Amen" to that, every one thought it.

Mrs. Cooney fitted up the little alcove with fresh muslin curtains and a tiny white bed. A picture of Jack Dempsey in ring costume, abandoned by the young plumber's assistant who had last occupied the room, was removed and replaced by a colored print of "Innocence Asleep," and behind the washstand was hung a splasher embroidered with the words:

Wash and Wipe Together. Be Good Friends Forever.

Delice bestowed her few trinkets in the closet and in one of the rickety bureau drawers—the only one that didn't stick so tight that the knob pulled off whenever she

tried to open it. She accepted the situation with surprising calm, receiving the broken men in committee of the whole upon the evening of the day when her tiny room was ready.

She wore a little two-piece suit of blue serge, and stout boots. Her bobbed hair had been vigorously combed and brushed, her face and hands scrubbed shiny. Mrs. Cooney presented the delegation, and Delice presented a languid hand to each in turn, beginning with the Rev. Elmer Watts and ending with Sam Billings.

"Delighted, I'm sure!" she murmured. "Do be seated, please!"

She had insisted on serving tea and cakes, although the room was so small that only two men at a time could get in, the rest hovering outside in the dark hall, awaiting their turn. To each Delice spoke a few kind words in the effort to put them at their ease.

"You must tell me all about the Bible," she reminded the Rev. Mr. Watts. "I've often heard mother speak well of it."

"So good of you to come!" she told Professor Morosini. "I know how busy you are!"

This to a man who had spent the entire afternoon on a bench on the Common, feeding peanuts to himself and the gray squirrels.

"Some day you must do my portrait," she remarked to Sam Billings, whose artistic resources were strained in the white-washing of a hen house.

At the conclusion of the reception, Delice made a little speech. She was deeply appreciative, she assured them, of their interest in her welfare. It would be her inspiration in life to justify their generosity, and, while she hated to talk about herself, she felt that their splendid confidence in her musical future would be amply justified. In proof thereof she would, with their kind permission, close with a violin solo.

The solo was warmly received, and was followed by many encores, winding up with "Turkey in the Straw," by request of Ran Cook.

Archie Somers lingered after the rest had gone. Delice tossed her head, rumbled her hair with her fingers, pirouetted up to him, and impulsively threw her arms about his neck.

"Did I put it across, old hoss?" she eagerly inquired. "The high-brow spiel,

I mean? Gee, it's great to be human again!"

"You done noble, kid! Knocked 'em all for a row of silent cops! Say, don't you want some toys, or candy, or something like that?"

Delice drew back and regarded him through narrowed lids.

"No toys! I got to live for me art! Now about candy—course, I must think of my figger; but a chocolate fudge now and then—huh? I ought to have a mesh bag; and of course a mesh bag's no good empty. I didn't hear nobody speak of an allowance, Archie!"

Somers blinked.

"I'll take that up at our next meeting, kid. Sure, a lady's got to have car fare on her. Here's fifty cents for a starter. You needn't say nothing about it to the gang."

"The secret shall die with me," she promised. "Wait!"

Archie turned back with one foot already across the threshold. Delice raised herself on her toes and bestowed a hearty kiss on his wrinkled cheek.

It was so many years since the little man had been kissed that he didn't know whether he liked it or not; but before he reached the corner lunch, he had decided that he did.

"The child has surprisingly good manners," the Rev. Watts was saying, between spoonfuls of oyster stew. "Her diction is—er—quite mature."

"Yeah," agreed Big Denny, as he drew a mug of coffee for Archie Somers. "But what gets me is, she scrapes a mean catgut! I didn't put much stock in what Archie here said, having been kept awake many's the night by his jew's-harp; but I'm sold to the idea of making the kid a profesh. She ought to hold down a cabaret job by the time she's eighteen or so."

"God forbid!" cried the Rev. Elmer Watts. "Cabarets are the portals to hell!"

"She could easy pick up a living playin' for high-toned dances," Ran Cook declared. "Did you note the way she swung into 'Turkey in the Straw'?"

"With a proper impresario," said Professor Morosini, "one who like myself has for years familiarized himself with what the public wants, she would be an ornament on the concert circuit."

Carter grinned.

"And she'll need a good publicity man, too. If we handle this thing right, maybe

we can all manage to sponge a living off Mlle. Delice, conservatory graduate and *artiste* extraordinary!"

Big Denny grunted.

"We'll all be in wheel chairs, or worse, when that time comes. I only hope enough of us holds out to see the kid set foursquare on her own blessed feet!"

V

PROFESSOR MOROSINI was financially embarrassed. The term is used strictly in its specialized sense. The condition did not prey upon his mind; it merely stimulated his ingenuity. In this instance it suggested a device of which he was secretly a little ashamed.

On the northern slope of the hill dwelt a hungry young Russian violinist, an exile who had been concert master in a Moscow orchestra. To Boris Kovalski the professor repaired one afternoon, and perfected an arrangement whereby he was to receive a sawbuck, or ten berries, for each new pupil he brought the young Russian. So persuasive was the former dime museum lecturer that he even succeeded in obtaining a five-dollar advance.

As men always do in like case, Morosini attempted to pacify his conscience by arguing—to himself—that he was moved solely by altruism. Kovalski needed pupils, and he was a great technician, whose services could fortunately be had for far less than what an inferior teacher out in the Back Bay would ask. Little Delice needed the best training at the lowest rates. He, Morosini, was able to do a good turn to both pupil and instructor. That he should also profit in a trifling way was unimportant to any one but himself.

He reported his success to the gang that evening at the dairy lunch.

"By rare good fortune I happen to know of a great genius living near by—a virtuoso who will undoubtedly appear, in time, in Symphony Hall," he explained. "Just now he is hard up, and consents to take a limited number of promising pupils at a merely nominal charge. I put myself out to see him to-day, and, since our ward is so young, he finally consented to break his usual rule and give her lessons at Mrs. Cooney's."

Big Denny looked up suspiciously from his task of slicing bread. He felt instinctively distrustful of any scheme in which Professor Morosini had a hand.

"Who is the guy?" he asked.

"Boris Kovalski, late of the Moscow Symphony—its soloist, in fact. He is a victim of the revolution. He tells me that in Russia he numbered many children of the grand dukes among his pupils, and that his terms were ten dollars for a half-hour lesson, in advance. We can get him for two dollars for a full hour."

There seemed no valid objection to such a bargain; but it was decided that Archie Somers, as their musical critic, should first go and hear Kovalski play. Professor Morosini gracefully admitted that his own musical education had been neglected in favor of oratory and mathematics.

Archie did go, heard, and was conquered.

"He's a wow!" the critic declared.

On the following day Kovalski gave Delice her first lesson. Whether swayed by gratitude or not, the young Russian was eloquent in his praise of the child's talent. She had, he admitted, acquired terrible habits of technique, her fingering was all wrong, she was full of the self-assurance and cockiness of youth; but the ability was there, sleeping, and awaiting the kiss of the master.

"What d'ya mean, kiss?" Big Denny asked belligerently.

The violinist was dining as Denny's guest—the first square meal he had eaten since leaving Ellis Island. He shrugged eloquently, an impaled frankfurter on his fork.

"It is a figure of ze speech—a metaphor, not? Her soul sleeps. *Chort*, I awaken eet by my virtuosity!"

Big Denny grunted.

"Well, young man, see that you treat Delice like she was one of them grand duke's kids. Get me?"

"But yes, *tavonish*—I shall treat her better," Boris promised. "For the grand dukes I have no love. Me, I am Kerensky man."

Thus into the house of Cooney came the soothing touch of melody. Archie Somers continued to twang his jew's-harp in idle hours, but it attracted no attention up on the attic floor; and he much preferred to sit huddled in a corner of the room, where he could hear Delice practice scales.

The girl was faithful about practicing—too faithful for one or two of the lodgers on her floor, who gave notice; but so great was the demand for cheap rooms that their places were quickly taken by new tenants.

In other ways Delice was not so submissive. She was entered in the public school on the next street, where her career was one of turbulence. She won all the honors in declamation, but stood near the foot of her classes in all subjects that did not enlist her interest; and about twice a week she came home with torn clothes and scratched face from some physical encounter with girls of many races and colors.

Her opponents were always girls older and bigger than herself. This gave Denny Martin great joy, and caused him—after first warning her not to tell any of her other adopted fathers—to give her lessons in the womanly art of self-defense and more or less mixed-ale tactics, for which she showed the same aptitude as she had for the violin.

After a time the remonstrances of Delice's teachers were so frequent that it became necessary to appoint somebody to interview them, and to receive the notes of complaint that the girl brought home. The Rev. Mr. Watts was considered to have the best qualifications for this office, and his venerable presence served as a buffer between the turbulent Delice and her ex-hausted preceptors.

Since mathematics was a subject in which the girl was especially hopeless, Professor Morosini, one-time lightning calculator, undertook to coach her. His novel short cuts, which ignored all schoolbook rules, caught Delice's fancy, and soon she was able to work out problems on the blackboard in less time, and with fewer chalk marks, than any other pupil. Although this boosted her marks, it did not lessen the burdens of her teachers, who could not understand the weird processes by which she somehow managed to get correct answers; nor could Delice herself explain. She simply absorbed what Professor Morosini taught her, and her progress was like that of a sleepwalker.

Carter, the old newspaper man, undertook to coach her in spoken and written English. He learned almost as much from her as she from him, and his artistic soul shrank from tampering with her pungent idioms; but he soon had her ranking as high in composition work as she already did in declamation.

A fresh problem arose when Delice began to go to church. She agreed readily enough to go alone to Sunday school, in one of the many houses of worship on the

hill; but go to service and listen to sermons she would not, unless her misery had company. Mrs. Cooney could not take the girl. Lacking a servant, she had to stay on guard to answer the doorbell, and to see that her lodgers did not loot one another in her absence, import questionable characters into their rooms, or stage noisy parties.

The Rev. Mr. Watts volunteered to take the child, provided she went to his own brand of church; but the rest of the men were unwilling to yield him so considerable a hold on the child's spiritual freedom. Their own religions were of the sketchiest sort, and they did not propose to raise their adopted daughter to be a bigot!

There remained but one way out of the dilemma—each man in turn must take her to church. He could choose his own, unless Delice herself expressed a choice. This was a radical change for most of them, but they found it rather agreeable to march hand in hand with a pretty child toggled out in her Sunday best. In fact, each waited his turn with some eagerness; and more often than not Delice had two of her foster fathers with her of a Sunday morning.

In the afternoon they took her out to Franklin Park or the Arboretum, or in cold weather to a free concert, to the forum of Ford Hall to hear a lecture, to Mrs. Jack Gardner's palace, or to the Art Museum. In midsummer they even went as far as the steamer trip to Provincetown, or else for a swim, steamed clams, and scenic railroading at Revere or Nantasket.

The amount of money they spent was trifling, by the standards of almost any one but a band of broken men; but to them it sometimes seemed as if Delice were as terrific a drain upon their resources as a standing army or a national debt. It forced them to effect a complete readjustment in their hitherto shiftless and easy-going lives.

A psychologist would have observed in this little stagnant group as marvelous a development as the annual miracle which causes old, decaying trees to burgeon forth with an abundance of green leaves and a fugitive display of blooms.

VI

THE broken men could effect few radical changes in their fortunes, for they were too old, and life had passed them by; but they could cast aside their apathy, the consent

to be defeated. Hitherto lacking an incentive, they now had one which weekly grew more exigent.

Delice was a true child of the stage. She was warm-hearted and mercurial, gifted and temperamental. She loved pretty things to wear; but the broken men loved even more to see her in a new fur-trimmed coat or a hat of the latest model. It is to be conceded that on Sundays her escorts were less concerned with what was being sung or preached than with what was being worn by young misses; for Delice, almost overnight, had ceased to be a patron of the children's departments, and begun to shop in the stores which catered to misses' apparel.

She had a beau or two, jealously scanned and discussed by the old men. She ate more bonbons than was good for her, and they were bought from smart confectioners on West Street. She played the violin in a school orchestra, and at church entertainments, and once at a festival in Mechanics' Hall. She cost her foster parents so much money that they were perpetually hard up and continuously happy. In their listless lives she had wrought many changes.

Big Denny Martin had lived well enough as night counter man at the corner lunch, working only six hours a day, and getting a small wage and whatever he wanted to eat. He now took on four extra hours, going to work at two in the afternoon, and his wages rose by one-third.

The Rev. Elmer Watts put more pep into his soliciting for insurance and subscription sets, and wore a brand-new frock coat and tie.

Ran Cook boldly invaded the aristocratic sections of Chestnut Street and Mount Vernon Street, and added many furnaces to his string.

Professor Morosini devised a cross-word puzzle feature for the picture houses, and received a check which almost dethroned his reason. A few years ago it would have sent him off on a prolonged spree; but he celebrated by giving his cronies a theater party and dinner, and by buying for Delice a leopard skin coat and a solid silver manicure set.

Sam Billings proclaimed himself to be a sure-enough calciminer, and was kept busy whitening ceilings all over the hill, at first getting more lime on his person than on the ceilings, but with practice winning pro-

ficiency. As he charged less by the day than the professionals got per hour, he prospered, and held up his end as a joint father.

Archie Somers bought a new dress suit, squared his shoulders, and went after the swell hotel trade. Within six months he had doubled his income; and he brought home to Delice rare examples of the pastry makers' art, favors, and flowers.

It was during this resurgence of atrophied ambitions that Carter, the least promising of them all, the most hopelessly in debt, blazed forth in his memorable and tragic renaissance.

He was a sickly man, discouraged, burned out. He had no other trade than that of journalism, which had sucked him dry—or so it seemed; yet it was Carter alone who won a brief recognition beyond the limits of the hill. Shamed by the noble efforts of his humbler comrades, spurred on by a genuine fondness for his little ward, he prowled about the mews and ghettos of the northern slope of the hill and of the South End. He felt his old instinct for a story stirring within him, laid his dull ear against the great, beating heart of the common people, and began to write little epics of the poor.

He felt the grief and pride of fathers and mothers whose children were taking hold on American customs and casting off the ancient traditions of Poland and Sicily and Syria. He quickened to the splendid self-denial of exiled Russian gentlefolk who were doing menial work, and doing it well and smilingly. He intruded into little festivals where a handful of old people from halfway around the world were heartening one another with quavering folk songs of a land that they would never again behold. It was he who dug up the story of the Italian organ grinder and his monkey, both dying from tuberculosis—the master playing his sweet old tunes in the sleet and the shrill winds, and paying for luxuries and the best care for the shivering little creature over in the Animal Hospital.

Dipping his rusty pen in tears and blood, and sometimes in gall, Carter produced a little series of masterpieces that ran for a year in the leading evening paper. Many readers cut them out and treasured them, and they were reprinted in a thin volume; but this was after Carter's death.

He was the first of Delice's guardians to go. She sat beside him at the last, holding

his thin, cold hand in her small warm ones. Just before he flickered out, a newsboy passed through the street below their window, crying an extra. Carter, who had not moved or spoken for hours, rose suddenly at the cry, and opened his eyes. He sought gently to free his hand.

"I must go!" he whispered. "There's a big story breaking!"

So Carter went.

Within six months he was followed by hale, hearty Ran Cook. The old horse dealer was passing a stable when a fire broke out in it, which caused the death of a score of horses. Cook saved half a dozen before the flames drove him away; but his unwonted exertions on a winter's night brought on a fever, which was followed by pneumonia and death.

With each loss the little band was forced to a more rigid economy to carry on. Thus does the burden of taxation increase in those rural hamlets of New England where year by year the population shrinks by death and migration. There is the same amount to be raised, with fewer to pay it.

By now, however, Delice was earning a little herself. Professor Morosini had secured her a place in a quartet at a picture house in a quiet section of the city. She had left high school, and was studying at the Conservatory.

In other ways the girl was growing up. One night, coming home from the lunch after closing up, Big Denny Martin found her in the shelter of Mrs. Cooney's doorway with a young man. Peering closely, and aided by the street lamp opposite, Denny decided, from a ripe knowledge of his own sex, that he did not at all like the eyes and mouth of the husky youth, a stranger to him.

"Begone with ye!" he growled. "'Tis no decent hour to be kaping a young girl outside her door!"

The young fellow unwound an arm from Delice's slender waist, and thrust his face close to Denny's.

"Where do you get that stuff, buttin' into my affairs? Get inside, if you live here, before I knock you through the panels!"

Big Denny drew a deep breath. His fingers slowly closed together, like the claws of an old lobster.

The girl spoke up hurriedly.

"He's all right, Denny!" she said. "Honest he is!"

"Who is he? Where'd you meet him?" Delice hesitated—a fact of which Denny took note.

"At a dance—a few nights ago."

"Huh! Well, if he's learned to dance, he ought to know it ain't genteel to kape a lady out on her own doorstep till past midnight!"

"You heard me," interrupted Delice's young man. "Get in, or get kicked in—which is it?"

"Nayther!" bellowed Big Denny.

His old hands, which in their day had conferred the bum's rush on the likes of this loafer many, many times, twined themselves, one in his collar, the other in the slack of his pants, and the next instant the young lover was running swiftly, unwillingly, and very profanely down the hill toward the River Charles.

A young patrolman rounded the next corner, stopped, recognized Big Denny, and received the young man into his arms.

"Been looking for you, Pittsburgh," he said, as he snapped on the twisters. "You're posted up at headquarters." He turned to Denny. "This is Pittsburgh Pete—recent arrival here. He's wanted for a little affair back home. You through with him, Denny?"

"I s'pose so," Martin grumbled. "I wish ye'd not butted in till I'd run him in the river, though!"

He went back to Mrs. Cooney's, and grinned while Delice bawled him out for interfering with her gentlemen friends; but when she had finished, he explained why it was that she would have to go to Pittsburgh if she wanted to see Pete again.

"Why, the big stiff!" Delice cried. "He told me he came from a very old Pennsylvania family!"

"Mebbe he did," admitted Denny; "with their silver, I dunno! Anyhow, they want to see him, bad."

All the rest of her life Delice was glad of the impulse which caused her to turn at the foot of the stairs and kiss Big Denny good night; for when Mrs. Cooney went to make up his room, next morning, she found him dead in his bed. His great heart had been strained when he manhandled Pittsburgh Pete, and he had quietly checked out in his sleep.

VII

In Symphony Hall a typically decorous Boston audience was listening to a dark,

slender young woman who, upon this foggy November day, was making her début as a professional violinist. It was a beautiful instrument she held, almost black, with a maple neck, and with sonorous tones free from wolf notes.

To the shriveled little old man who sat in a front orchestra chair, and whose profound knowledge of the jew's-harp made him something of a critic, there was but one thing lacking, and that was not in the performer, but in her audience.

True, Boston audiences are not passionate. They hear a great deal of music of all sorts, rendered by the greatest soloists; and if in this lovely young woman's interpretations they found nothing to cavil at, it is equally true that they had many times listened to the same selections played quite as well.

So they had sat, politely attentive, and had heard Scharwenka's fiery "Polish Dance," Massenet's "Élégie," Moszkowsky's "Serenata," Tschaiowsky's "Sérénade Mélancolique"; and at the conclusion they had applauded decorously and a little patronizingly. The phrasing had been good, the tone pure, the technical dexterity adequate; and yet they were conscious of a little lack of warmth, of vitality. Without enthusiasm they now listened to the voice of the young woman, at the conclusion of her formal program.

"I thank you—I thank you so much! With your generous permission, I shall conclude with an extra that is not on the program—a little tone poem that I composed years ago. In playing it I am keeping faith with those whose love and self-denial made it possible for me to appear before you today. I will play for you 'The Street of Broken Men.'"

Harshly, almost querulously, her bow smote the strings in a violent discord. There came sounds which the mellow throat of a violin seldom utters—rude, dry scrapings and crashings, as of a long line of ash cans being dragged across sidewalks and dumped into carts; shrill calls, as from window to window across back yards where hang dank lines of wet wash; street cries—the old umbrella mender, the scissors grinder, the newsboys, the vegetable man, the whistle of the postman, the shouts of vendors of kindling wood and charcoal, of oranges and strawberries; the clang of the police ambulance, the slamming of doors, the close harmony of stray cats.

But little by little the dissonances ceased, the tempo slowed down, the muted strings gave forth only the sound of footsteps at night, when the shops are closed, and lights shine behind drawn curtains—footsteps reluctantly creeping to homes that are only a mockery of home. It was the sound of old feet, with nowhere to go, of worn shoes stumbling in the hollows of uneven brick sidewalks—the steps of those who are

beaten, forgotten, left behind—the restless, listless steps of broken men!

When she finished, her hearers rose and applauded her with real enthusiasm, because she had made them feel a little of what she herself felt so poignantly.

Archie Somers, huddled in his front seat, could not rise until his shoulders had ceased shaking with the dry sobs that left him at once proud, and happy, and lonely.

Discovery

ON COMING OUT OF PRISON, HOWARD WARD FOUND STRONG REASONS FOR MAKING A NEW AND HAPPIER START IN LIFE

By L. M. Hussey

ONCE Howard Ward had seen, in a newspaper, a photograph that had specially impressed him. Perhaps that had been a prophetic moment; but at any rate the picture had curiously aroused his interest and sympathy.

It was the photograph of a man who had once held public office, and been held in respect, and then, to the surprise of every one, had been caught in a felony and jailed for it. The snapshot showed the man on the day that marked the end of his prison term. He was seen shaking hands with the warden, whose face clearly showed cordial good will. Howard Ward, discovering a sudden interest in this scene, had sympathetically wondered whether the released prisoner found the outside world as kindly as the warden.

With a start, he remembered that photograph now. Incredibly and shamefully enough, he himself was enacting the same scene. The warden stood in his plain little office, near the desk, shaking Howard Ward's hand and smiling gravely.

"Well, good-by, Ward," he said.

"Good-by, Mr. Knowles—and thank you, too!"

"No, you needn't thank me. I kept the rules—I really didn't show you any special favor while you were here. If you had it a little easier than some of the others, it

was because you earned it. Every prisoner who cares to be decent has the same chance."

Howard nodded, without saying anything; but he smiled a little. Although he would not dispute the point with the warden, he felt assured that the head of the prison liked him, and had liked him for some time. It was pleasant to feel that. He understood that Knowles was not, as he tried to make out, simply an inhuman machine for carrying out prison regulations. It warmed Howard to be fully conscious of the human touch in the hand that grasped his own.

"I know well enough," Knowles continued, "that we won't see you here again."

"Surely not!"

"Then it's a final good-by. Luck to you, Ward!"

The warden released Howard's hand, and, murmuring his thanks once more, he moved toward the door. Outside, he stood for a second irresolutely in the corridor. His prisoner's habit, after two years, urged him to turn to the left, retracing the path that would have carried him back to his cell.

The guard, who had been waiting, seemed to divine his impulse, for he grinned and touched Howard's arm.

"The other way this time!" he said.

It was with a sense of unreality that the freed man walked down the long passage in this unfamiliar direction. The warden's quarters, a sort of square tower of three stories, formed one corner of the outer prison wall, and it was here, through a small iron-ribbed door, that released prisoners were usually delivered to the outer world. Behind this door, at the moment, sat another guard. He turned the knob for Howard Ward, and the young man found himself in the street.

Standing on the pavement, his eyes somewhat dazzled by the sunlight, he thought again of the photograph of that other malefactor who had aroused his sympathy before he had ever dreamed of experiencing a similar shame. He had wondered what freedom had meant to the other man.

What did freedom mean to any prisoner—that is to say, any prisoner whose crime was to some degree an accident, not an accustomed way of life? Were these freed men ever able to reënter the world and pick up the dropped threads of respectability and honor? The old questions, once asked idly out of mere curiosity, now returned vividly, with a far more terrible and intimate meaning.

All about him, in the sun-drenched street, although it was momentarily empty of other human figures, Howard felt a great unfriendliness. Alone, he had the irrational sense of being stared at. The windows of the houses across from the prison, glinting with sunshine, regarded him like widely opened scornful eyes. Never had he been more ashamed, even during the tormenting days of his trial two years ago.

Angrily he told himself that he must put shame out of his mind, must erase the past, and must enter into life once more; but the sharp self-admonition had little effect. As an automobile swung abruptly around the corner, he started to walk away, almost to run away. Just then he shrank from the possible glance of any human eye.

He had covered, in this shrinking retreat, perhaps ten or twelve paces when he was amazed to hear some one calling his name. To be hailed at this moment was so unexpected that the sound almost frightened him. By a conscious effort, however, he subdued an immediate impulse to run.

He turned. The automobile had drawn up to the curb. At the wheel sat an elder-

ly man, leaning out, beckoning with one free hand.

"Howard!" he called.

II

At once Howard recognized him. It was Hamilton Marriott, one of his dead father's friends, who had remained a friend to him during all the long term of his disgrace. Marriott had visited him half a dozen times in prison, had written to him, and had been, in effect, the single cordial link binding Howard Ward to his old life. Surely he might have expected that his father's old friend, and his own, would come to meet him the moment the prison doors were opened!

They were shaking hands.

"Come around and get in on the other side, Howard—next to me. Almost missed you! I telephoned the warden this morning, and he said you'd be coming out at eleven. It isn't quite eleven yet. You came out earlier than I expected."

"Very, very good of you, Mr. Marriott! I hardly expected to see anybody."

"Well, I wanted to give you a little surprise. Silly notion, I suppose! I should have asked the warden to tell you. The way it turned out, I might have missed you altogether."

Hamilton Marriott's ruddy face and kindly gray eyes were turned toward the younger man.

"Now, Howard," he began, "I'll take you anywhere you want to go; but I don't suppose that you have made any plans as yet."

Howard shook his head. That was true; he was still a little bewildered. If Marriott hadn't happened along, he might have wandered at random through the streets for hours.

Of course, there was his apartment—he still had that; but he had scarcely thought of it. His former life, his old rooms, seemed immeasurably remote.

"Good! I was hoping you'd come with me. We'll have lunch together, and this afternoon we can talk. We can have a long chat and try to set some things straight."

Marriott released the clutch pedal, and the car jumped forward. Young Ward was nodding his head earnestly. He straightened his shoulders, and seemed to brace himself.

"Yes, that's it, Mr. Marriott—there are things I've got to get straight. It'll be

good to talk with you. You see, I've got to forget about—that!"

His head jerked backward toward the prison. At the next corner they turned, and its walls were no longer visible.

"Maybe it sounds foolish to talk about forgetting such a thing, but I've reasoned it all out for myself. I've had plenty of time!"

He laughed, but not pleasantly. Marriott did not speak.

"Yes, I've had plenty of time to think things over," continued Ward. "When I got in with that promotion crowd, I thought I was traveling in very smart company. Oh, I learned soon enough the whole scheme was a swindle—and of course, if I hadn't been the worst kind of a fool, I'd have backed out right then. I don't know whether you can understand or not—it hasn't been so easy for me to understand myself, thinking it all over—I actually went along in that affair without looking at the right or wrong of it. I think I understand how a man feels when he gets at a roulette wheel—when something gets hold of him, and he can't quit until he's cleaned out, ruined. Do you see, Mr. Marriott? Something like that had hold of me. It was a game! It was fascinating! I didn't wake up until the others had suddenly jumped out of town, leaving me to pay the piper."

With his eyes on the street, the older man nodded gravely.

"I've always been glad you didn't run away, Howard."

Momentarily Ward's lips tightened.

"No, I didn't run away," he continued. "I've had time to think over that, too; and I've not been able quite to decide. Was it because, after all, there was something decent in me, at bottom, or just because I was too big a fool to know when to get out?"

Marriott's eyes still watched the street, but his voice was raised earnestly.

"That's one of the things we've got to settle in our talk this afternoon, Howard—your viewpoint—I mean the way you look at yourself. When a decent man, through some unhappy chance or other, gets into a mess, he's always cruelly hard on himself. After all, isn't that a sure sign of his decency? He doesn't excuse himself. I wouldn't be so certain of you if I found you excusing yourself; but you've paid the piper, as you put it, and there's no sense

in going on paying. A minute ago you said a very wise thing—that it was necessary to forget. That's it exactly—so far as you can, you must put all this out of your mind. Something got hold of you. You did something you can't quite explain. You paid the price for it, and now you're going to forget about it."

They had turned into a street of tall brownstone houses—dwellings that had been fashionable a few decades before, and that still, in this quarter, retained their old air of aloof respectability. How well remembered was this street to Howard Ward! It was a part of his early recollections, for he had first visited it with his father, while still a lad.

Hamilton Marriott was pressing on the brake. The motor slowed and stopped, and the older man was edging out from beneath the wheel.

"Well, nothing changes here, Howard! We'll go right in."

Together they mounted the flight of sandstone steps, stained and worn into cavities, and Howard entered the familiar hall. Marriott's man came forward quickly and took his hat. He nodded pleasantly, as if young Ward had been calling at this house as usual, as if there had been no painful hiatus of more than two years.

"We'll be ready for lunch any time, Corwin," Marriott instructed. "You might tell Miss Lucy that we've come." He turned to the younger man. "We'll go into the drawing-room. There's time for a smoke, I think."

Howard Ward followed his host, frowning. He had not considered the possibility of a third person. Lucy—Hamilton Marriott's niece, of course. She divided her time between him and another uncle.

It was more than three years since Ward had seen her. The last time, a year before his disgrace, she had been a rather attractive schoolgirl. He still visioned her in that semblance, with dark hair—a deep chestnut, if his memory did not fail him—falling over her shoulders. After all, Lucy Marriott's presence wouldn't much matter. She was hardly more than a child.

He raised his eyes to Marriott. The older man was fumbling with the lid of a humidor. Surprised, startled, young Ward saw his hands falter for an instant, and then, with an agonizing tautness, press themselves, one over the other, against his heart. Marriott's face was amazingly white

—bluish white—and his lips were set in a painful grimace.

The young man ran forward, just in time to catch his friend before Marriott toppled to the floor. The sufferer was not unconscious, and did not go limp, but he was in excessive pain and apprehension, and entirely helpless.

Howard held him for an alarmed, uncertain moment. Then, with a swift backward glance, he saw the sofa, and to this he virtually carried the old man. What had happened? Howard found himself, with an arm still about the sufferer, calling for Corwin.

There was a patter of running feet on the stairs, but not Corwin's heavier tread. A young woman entered the room, her face already alarmed, for she had caught the inflection of acute anxiety in Ward's voice. In this anxious moment Howard did not question her presence, and scarcely looked at her.

"Another attack!" she murmured.

She was out of the room at once. She had been gone no more than a second, it seemed, when she returned, bearing a small white carton in one hand. Out of the carton she took a little glass globule filled with liquid. She was folding a handkerchief about the globule.

"Can you crush this?"

Howard took the handkerchief, felt the tip of the globule beneath the linen, and snapped it off. A sweet and half intoxicating vapor ascended about his face.

"Quickly!" cried the girl.

She snatched the handkerchief from his hand, and pressed it under Marriott's nostrils. Almost miraculously the attack was over. The ashy blue face was tinted with returning color. Marriott dropped his hands from his heart, and his lips relaxed, as well as his entire body. He sank down upon the cushions in utter weakness, as if he had just emerged from a terrible physical encounter.

He looked amazingly weak, utterly beaten, but plainly he was no longer in pain. He even contrived to smile a little.

"Sorry!" he whispered. "Afraid I'll have to go upstairs. Angina, Howard—attacks for more than a year."

Corwin appeared, and a housemaid. The two men, Corwin and Ward, each put an arm about the old man and lifted him to his feet. It was a difficult journey upstairs, but they finally laid him on his bed.

His respiration, which had been rapid, almost gasping, seemed normal now, and he was in no pain. The girl was pulling down the window shades.

"You go down to lunch, Howard," said Marriott in a somewhat stronger voice; "and you, Lucy. I need no one here. Fortunately there'll be no other attack today. Let me rest for an hour or two, and I'll get my strength again. A strange thing, Howard! Terrible experiences, these attacks! Afterward—one is wrung out."

His words were reassuring, and questioning Howard Ward glanced at the young woman. A young woman! He was suddenly aware that he had not been given time for surprise. Foolishly enough, he had expected to meet a schoolgirl. He had not realized that three years is ample time to transform a schoolgirl into a woman.

Lucy Marriott met his eyes, and laughed. She held out her hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Ward? It's not too late now for the regular formalities, is it? I've half an idea you didn't know who I was!"

"Of course I—"

"No use pretending—you didn't know me! Well, I don't blame you. You see, I've grown up."

Marriott had closed his eyes. His face looked peaceful, and he was breathing rhythmically. Lucy moved quietly toward the door.

"He'll probably sleep a little," she whispered.

Howard followed her downstairs, and they went out together to the dining room.

III

THEY sat at the luncheon table, conversing—or, rather, it was Lucy who contrived the conversation. She spoke as if she and Howard Ward had met for the last time no later than the day before yesterday. All her little gestures, too, were easy and effortless.

In former years Howard and Lucy had always been friendly. He had deemed her a most engaging child; but now she was no longer a child! To her had happened a common yet none the less ineffable miracle—the transmutation from childhood to youthful, adult grace. Once she had seemed to Howard a sweet little girl; now she was capable of a far more profound appeal. The movements of her hands, accentuating a word, were disturbing. Dis-

turbing, too, was the glint of gold in her dark brown hair, the high arch of her eyebrows, the eyes half blue and half brown, the changing curves of her lips, the flux of expression upon her face.

The isolation and shame and suffering of the past two years made this first moment of intimate talk with a charming girl strangely perplexing. To Howard Ward it was half pleasure and half pain.

In spite of the ease of her talk, he found his own words thwarted by a curious restraint. No matter what was said, his thoughts wandered ceaselessly to a disquieting series of questions. What did she know about him? How much had her uncle revealed in answer to her possible queries? Surely, never seeing him at the house during any of her visits, she had interrogated Marriott? Had he revealed the truth, or had he concealed it by some easy evasion?

Probably she knew nothing. Had the truth been revealed to her—the miserable tale of his silly disgrace and imprisonment—she would not be half so blithe and pleasant now. Momentarily Howard was glad that she knew nothing of the truth, and in the next second he regretted her ignorance.

There was something fundamentally honest in Ward, in spite of his one bad misadventure. He felt a potent wish, which he did not pause to analyze, not to play a part with Lucy Marriott. He wanted her to know him exactly as he was; and yet, irrationally enough, it perturbed him deeply to suspect that after all his secret might be known to her.

They dallied awhile over the coffee, and then Lucy suggested that they should go into the library.

"Uncle's still resting, I suppose," she said. "Poor old dear, we won't disturb him, will we? I'll do my best to entertain you, Mr. Ward, until he comes down."

"You can do that easily," replied Howard, smiling.

"Well, it's not very hard to be pleasant to an old friend!"

She stood in front of one of the tall bookcases, running her finger tips across the glass door. Against the glass her forward-tilted head, as if weighted down by the coils of her abundant hair, was dimly reflected. She stared a second at the rows of books.

"I want you to know," she said, "that

I'm not the frivolous thing I used to be. I'm not at all the girl you remember. Really, I read a great many of these books of uncle's—even the thick ones!"

"Even the very thick ones?" asked Howard.

"Well, I don't prefer them overgrown. Isn't it amusing how one likes certain things, if only one isn't obliged to like them? At school they called reading books 'English,' and made us write essays about it. As long as books were 'English,' I never read a thing."

"It's been two years since I've read a single book, thick or thin," remarked Howard.

At once he felt his cheeks coloring. He saw the absurdity of this inadvertence. An absurd, disastrous remark! She would be certain to question him. He was conscious of her eyes scrutinizing his face.

Compressing his lips, he met Lucy's glance. Henceforth it was necessary to be honest, even if one carried honesty to fanatical lengths—even if one carried honesty to the length of losing this suddenly sweet friendship of Lucy Marriott!

"I know you wonder how that could be," he began. "I'm going to explain."

He saw her put out her hand with a movement as if to restrain him, but he ignored the gesture.

"A little more than two years ago," he went on, "I made a horrible fool of myself. I was arrested, convicted, and sent to prison. I've been in prison these past two years. You don't customarily have much time to read—there!"

Her eyes had not left his face, and Howard's eyes still met them. Then, suddenly, her gaze dropped. He saw that her lips were trembling. Her voice, too, as she spoke, was trembling distressingly.

"You needn't have said that," she murmured. "You needn't have reminded yourself—or me."

"You knew, then?"

"Oh, yes, I knew! I've felt bitterly, bitterly sorry for you!"

"You've thought of me and been sorry for me?"

"Yes, I have thought of you—hundreds of times. Don't say you made an awful fool of yourself! You couldn't help it. I understand—your partners were rascals, but you didn't know what sort of men they were until it was too late; and then you paid so terribly for their crimes! Oh, I've

known all the time that you were really innocent, Howard, my poor friend!"

The abrupt use of this intimate name, the throbbing compassion in Lucy's voice, utterly unnerved Howard Ward. It destroyed, in an instant, his stanch resolution to be wholly, terribly frank, to expose himself completely. He must not tell her!

She knew that he had been in prison, and yet she had remained his friend! Changing from child to woman, she had held that friendship dear—an intimacy which he had half forgotten and incredibly undervalued! She believed him innocent! Yes, it was a miracle—a miracle of her marvelous compassion—but she firmly believed him innocent!

He dare not confess the truth. He knew now that she was too precious to risk confession. She was the priceless, pitying link that reclaimed him to humanity, that held him fast to other days, to life renewed after the shameful, tomblike disavowance of the prison!

Yes, her false belief in his innocence must be maintained at any cost—even at the cost of breaking faith with his higher resolutions. Involuntarily he clenched his hands until the finger nails pressed painfully into the flesh. Wasn't there something still higher, more important still, than his resolve to be utterly candid, utterly truthful in all his future dealings, no matter with whom? Wasn't he conscious now of a higher need transcending everything?

Yes, he was conscious of an abounding need—the need of a link with his fellow mortals, the need of a gracious sympathy, a tenderness, a believing heart; and this was the need he saw suddenly fulfilled in Lucy Marriott. It was part of the miracle that she had thought of him constantly while he was in prison, although he had scarcely thought of her at all. And it was no less compelling a part of the miracle that she had thought of him always as a victim, an innocent man. No, he must not deny his innocence!

It required less than a moment, it seemed, for these reflections to shape themselves in Howard's mind. She had called him "Howard, my poor friend." With the words she had extended her hand in an involuntary gesture of further intimacy. Thinking rapidly, he still saw her extended fingers. Yearning suddenly for some physical assurance, he put out his own

hand and touched hers. Their finger tips touched; their hands clasped. Howard found himself able to speak.

"I thought I was coming here to-day to talk only with your uncle," he murmured. "I didn't know I was to discover you, Lucy! Can you imagine how much that discovery means to me? What made you hold me in your mind during these past years? What made you believe in me, think of me?"

She did not attempt to withdraw her hand. He saw that she was smiling.

"How can I answer that, Howard? What makes us think of any one, believe in any one? Yet always there is—some one."

He felt that her strange sympathy, a magical emotion, had brought her very close to him. He needed her still nearer! A few hours ago, just liberated from the prison, bewildered, this girl had been wholly out of his mind; but now she was immeasurably important, the whole of his thoughts!

He felt himself warmed by a sudden, acute zest for life. He experienced an overwhelming enthusiasm for a life that could bestow such exquisite, undreamed events. Pressing upon her captured hand, he drew Lucy toward him.

For a second she yielded, but then she pulled back swiftly, releasing her hand. Ward stared at her in momentary surprise. A second later he also heard a slow step on the stairs. Old Marriott came into the library. The young man greeted him eagerly.

"You're better now? You feel quite well again?"

"Quite well again, Howard. There's something frighteningly sudden about these attacks, but they pass off quickly, too. Sooner or later, of course, one of them will finish me. A quick enough end! A good way of going out!"

"No!" exclaimed Lucy. "Please don't talk about that, uncle!"

The old man laughed.

"Well, we won't talk about me at all, then. In fact, there's a lot I want to say to Howard."

"I know there is," said the girl; "and I'll leave you alone to say it. Good-by, Mr. Ward. When we meet again, you'll know who I am—and it won't be three years, I hope!"

Howard bowed. It amused him to bow

in this formal way, and to hear Lucy call him "Mr. Ward." An hour ago these formalities would have been natural, but now they were merely a mask, concealing the secret of a sudden but abiding intimacy.

IV

LUCY had left the room, and Howard was seated with his old friend, talking. He was speaking of his life in prison—the dull routine, the indignity of it. He said that his punishment had shown him how necessary it is to keep a ceaseless watch on one's acts. Outside the prison one seemed safe and free, but there was always the possible misstep, the lack of honest foresight, that might betray one.

Marriott nodded.

"But you're going to forget about all that," he said.

Yes, Howard was resolved to forget; and now, with the miracle of Lucy's tender companionship, forgetting appeared measurably easy.

But suddenly, as Marriott talked, the thought of his recent resolutions returned to him. Wasn't he stepping back into his former path? Wasn't he beginning his new life with a deception? Lucy Marriott had passionately declared a belief in his innocence, and he had not undeceived her. He had not admitted his guilt.

Marriott had become reminiscent. He was telling Howard of things that had happened while the young man was still a child. Howard seemed to listen, but actually his mind was absorbed by this new and terrible problem.

Angrily he told himself that avoiding the old mistakes didn't mean that he must go through life like a sentimental ass. He needn't try to live out in real life the legend of the little hatchet and the cherry tree. Weren't there some perfectly excusable deceptions? It was a wonderful and gracious thing that Lucy refused to credit his guilt. Damn his new scrupulousness! Had he any right to destroy an illusion so precious?

Sitting with old Marriott, he could come to no final resolution. He grew restless. He stood up and walked to the window. Then, turning sharply, he said:

"I didn't realize it was getting so late. The afternoon's nearly over."

"Don't worry about that, Howard. Stay and have dinner with us."

Young Ward shook his head and smiled a little wryly.

"No, I believe I'll go now. You see, I haven't seen much of my diggings lately."

Marriott went with him to the door, and there they shook hands.

For a little while Howard was able to put his problem partly out of mind in his curiosity to see his rooms once more after a lapse of two years. Marriott had seen that they were kept in order, he knew. He entered the apartment house and stepped into the elevator. The elevator boy was a stranger.

Stepping out of the cage, he walked quickly down the familiar corridor, turned his key in the lock, and entered. Here nothing was changed. Everything remained as it was when, after his conviction, Howard left this place and delivered himself up to his jailers. In the small living room he sat down in front of his tall, old-fashioned desk.

Exteriorly nothing was changed—but in a deeper way the changes were measureless! The last time he had sat before this desk there had been no Lucy in his mind—nothing but imminent disgrace.

As if she was in the room with him, he heard her speaking again:

"I've known all the time that you were innocent, Howard, my poor friend!"

Then, abruptly, there came to him the conviction that he had not paid the final price for his wrongdoing. No, the prison had not exacted the ultimate punishment. That last punishment had been saved until this moment. He was to be punished now by losing Lucy, losing her faith and her promise, almost in the hour of their discovery. He could not argue with himself any longer. Wise or foolish, he could see only one course.

Harshly he lowered the lid of the desk. He took out a sheet of letter paper, and found a pen. He began to write:

A few hours ago I hadn't the courage to tell you the truth—the truth about myself, Lucy. You seemed suddenly so dear to me that I couldn't bear to lose you; but I'm forced to write the truth. All your pity for the innocent man being punished was wasted. I was never innocent. I deserved my sentence.

It's a terrible thing for me to confess this to you. It breaks a sudden, wonderful tie. I don't know just what I shall do now. I can't pick up the old threads of life here. I suppose I must think out some new plan, go somewhere else. This means good-by to you, Lucy.

He slipped the note into an envelope and addressed it; but somehow he lacked the

physical power to leave his rooms, to go out and mail the letter. Writing this confession, keeping harshly, terribly, to the very word of his resolution, had exhausted his strength. At last he telephoned to the desk and requested a messenger.

The boy came and departed with the letter.

V

It became quite dark in the apartment. Howard Ward sat motionlessly at the desk. Probably he had been a fool. Doubtless this was an act of utter folly—to set himself adrift for the sake of keeping exactly to a new code of brutal honesty; but he had tried the other way of life, and had had to live out two years of shame.

Now, of course, he was utterly adrift. He had found a tie in an hour, and had lost it. He pressed his face hard against the cupped palms of his hands.

Abruptly he stiffened. Some one had silently entered the apartment. He stood up and switched on the electric light. From the inner hall a girl appeared—Lucy.

She broke in upon his exclamation with swift words.

"I tore your letter up at once," she said. "What a foolish thing! You don't know anything about me, Howard! Look at this!" She fumbled in her hand bag for a second, and drew out a bit of cardboard. "Take it!"

She thrust the cardboard into Howard's hands. His fingers closed over it. One side was glazed. He turned it over, staring. It was a photograph of himself!

"Where did I get that? I got it four years ago! I stole it from uncle's desk.

Yes, I was a silly schoolgirl who had found a romantic hero—you! Afterward, when I learned what had happened to you, I cried for days. I couldn't believe that my romantic hero was in prison. I thought how terribly I had been fooled and cheated; and then I took out that little photo, and you seemed just the same to me—only I pitied you! I discovered that a romantic hero is all the more dear when he's not quite so perfect any more, when you can pity him!"

"What do you mean?" asked Howard slowly. "Not quite so perfect any more? I thought—"

She shook her head half angrily.

"Why did you have to write me such a silly letter? Don't you see that I was only trying not to hurt you, Howard? Of course I always knew you weren't innocent. I knew you had done something wrong, and were paying for it so dreadfully! That made me—care for you all the more."

The amazing revelation of her words, the glamour of her nearness, kept Howard silent. Their eyes met.

"Well!" she cried. "Can't you say anything? What are you thinking?"

Instantly he stepped toward her. He seized her hands.

"I was thinking—" he began.

"You were thinking," she murmured, as he drew her closer, "that I haven't any shame, coming here like this and telling you everything—my secret for so long! Well, I haven't, Howard! The day I was able to steal that snapshot from uncle's desk I knew I had no shame—toward you! I knew that some day I'd have to make you love me!"

ACROSS THE YEARS

ACROSS the years, when autumn comes
With dahlias and chrysanthemums,
Along the saddening garden walks
Your spirit comes to me and talks,
The while the last bee listless hums,
And early dew the cricket numbs,
And shadow after shadow stalks
To the low tap of phantom drums

Across the years.

But we mark not the sorrowing scene,
Nor mourn the vanished gold and green,
Your eyes on mine, your moon-white breast
Finding with me its ancient rest;
What life has meant, life still doth mean

Across the years.

Oliver C. Moore

Two Birds

MM. ZACUSSEC AND BADOT, GENTLEMEN OF PARIS, HAVE A
DISAGREEABLE EXPERIENCE WITH AN OUTLANDISH
AND IMPOSSIBLE AMERICAN

By Luke Thomas

IT was without an appointment that Francois Zacussec met his friend Maximilien Badot under the awning of the Café Chasse-Cafard. The action might have been part of a pantomime well rehearsed, for Zacussec drew up a chair in mournful silence, Badot nodded his head, and a waiter placed two small glasses of vermouth-cassis before them.

The scene was indeed rehearsed, for every day promptly at noon it was so enacted—unless one of the actors chanced upon a more attractive engagement, in which case no notice of absence was required. The forsaken member of the cast would carry through the performance without understudy for the full two hours which the tired business man of Paris allows for his quick lunch.

Badot was a business man because of the tiny room that he occupied in the offices of the Compagnie Internationale des Manches à Balai. His father, the president of the company, preferred to have him profitably idle in an office, rather than idly occupied in a studio; but Maximilien had never ceased to believe that the cause of *belles lettres* was the loser thereby. The violet ink which flowed so freely from his pen in the composition of *vers libres* seemed strangled when it came to devising advertisements at ten centimes a word; but the stationery provided by the Compagnie Internationale was perfectly presentable if one clipped off the printed head. When rimes were scarce, there was a deep-bedded sofa in the room, where Maximilien might lie down if the tyranny of business hours became too oppressive.

Zacussec was not a business man, but he was tired, for his activities were far more varied than those of Badot. He was a

student of human nature in the abstract, and in the concrete a guide, friend, and counselor to those rare visitors to France who required assistance in jettisoning their bank rolls. He could show you the spot where General Pershing knelt at the tomb of Lafayette, or introduce you to the Pou Agile, where actors out of a job, stripped to the waist, fought to the death with knives for ten francs a night, dinner and wine gratis.

He would meet your train at the Gare du Nord, remind you of the forgotten days when he had met you at a reception in the embassy at Washington, and guarantee you, for a small consideration, an appropriate suite at the Hôtel de Ville. He was not one of those suspicious characters whom we call confidence men, because he at least gave something in return for every franc he exchanged for dollars and pounds. When he called for his commission from the proprietors of the Pou Agile or the Toto Inconnu, his conscience was easy in the knowledge that his clients had had their promised treat of synthetic absinth and apathetic Apaches. He considered that he was as much entitled to a share of the inflowing stream of gold as was any other devastated area of France.

But to-day the smile that was his fortune had drooped into a mask of tragedy. Zacussec had had a bad run of luck. Only that morning the stranger in the checked suit, whom he had found helplessly buzzing in the web of a taxi driver, had remembered him from the year before, and had demanded the return of the hundred-franc loan which had made their parting so pleasant.

"Monsieur is an American," he had begun, when the blow fell.

"Yes, my name's Clayson, and yours is Zaco—something or other, and you owe me a hundred francs I lent you last summer to buy an artificial leg for a crippled dog. Now come across, or I'll introduce you to that musical comedy cop over there!"

Zacusec produced a bank note, gazing a wistful adieu at the engraving of the warlike goddess who alone stood between him and starvation.

"It is indeed fortunate," he said, "that I should thus meet *monsieur*. For almost a year I have tried to find you, but—"

The American pocketed the bill.

"Well, you needn't try again," he said, and impolitely turned his back, leaving Zacusec to make his penniless way to the Café Chasse-Cafard.

II

BADOT, apparently, was in no mood to offer a transfusion of joy and prosperity; nor did his friend seem to expect it, for the two sat in injured silence and stared through the smoke of their cheap cigarettes at the silk stockings of the *midinettes* that twinkled over the dusty sidewalk.

Badot was in love. It was not the first time that he had been exposed to the *grande passion*. Moreover, he belonged to a race with whom the archer's wounds are supposed to be but skin deep; but when one is twenty-two, and it is spring in Paris, and one's *bien aimée* believes one to be a poet laureate of her own discovering, it is very hard to have to take seriously the international distribution of broom handles.

"I tell you, François," he said at last, faintly cheered by the arrival of two more pink glasses, "it is no longer worth the trouble."

"*Hein?*" said Zacusec, suddenly recalled from the shipwreck of his fortune.

"I tell you," repeated Badot, "it is no longer worth while. A man must be free to follow his heart, or he is not a man—he is an animal. Am I an animal, to be kept in a stall all my life?"

"Absolutely," said Zacusec.

"What?" said Badot.

"No," said Zacusec. "I mean, certainly not. You are quite right. What were you talking about?"

Badot stared pityingly at his companion, and then dropped his chin in his hands and resumed his review of the sidewalk parade.

A waiter came with a grimy cloth and gently stirred the spilled liquids on the marble table top. Zacusec withdrew his immaculate trousers from the threatened overflow, and turned toward Badot.

"What have you to be gloomy about?" he asked. "Has the president, your father, enlarged your duties, or has *la belle Lisette* shown herself unworthy of your love?"

Badot dropped his sorrowful pose like a trained animal called from its stool by a crack of the trainer's whip.

"It is not just," he said. "I have not deserved it. In these matters of the heart a man is like the martyrs of Rome, fighting naked against armed warriors. He must give everything. He must wring the drops of blood from his heart, that they be counted. He must brand his soul with the name of one who has no soul; and then—then—François, I have been very badly treated!"

"Ah!" said Zacusec. "It is Lisette!"

The first time that Badot had failed to keep the tacit rendezvous at the Chasse-Cafard, Zacusec had asked no questions; but when his friend's absences increased, his suspicions were aroused. Finally, one day—it was pay day at the Compagnie Internationale—Badot had invited him to lunch at a restaurant with white cloths on the tables, and a separate dish for each *hors d'œuvre*, and there he had met Lisette.

She was beautiful—far beyond the deserts of a manufacturer of broom handles, thought Zacusec. Her face was coral and mother-of-pearl, and her neck was a delicate brown. Her hands were short and soft, and her ankles, above the round-toed shoes, might have been cast in wax and clad in silk to adorn any shop window of the boulevards.

Her days were spent behind the hosiery counter of the Galleries Lafayette; but Zacusec, the student of human nature, had guessed the transition from the silk worm to the butterfly, and vaguely envied Badot his good fortune.

"Yes," said Badot, "it *was* Lisette. For me she is no more. The kisses, the tears, the vows we've shared, were drops of water on the dry sands of her heart. François, she has given me the sack!"

And Badot resumed the pose which he believed Rodin would have approved, had Rodin ever known Lisette.

"My poor friend," said Zacusec, "I'm sorry for you. Let's have something to eat."

He motioned to the waiter; but Badot felt that the best dishes of the Chasse-Cafard could not harmonize with a broken heart, and sadly waved away all thought of food.

With a *friture* and some *pommes risso-lées* before him, Zacussec's sympathies began to broaden. Speaking with difficulty through his second mouthful, he invited Badot to unburden his soul.

"I know," said Badot, "that you are a man of the world. To you all people are but types for you to study. Have you never stopped to think that behind this curtain of flesh and clothing there lie drama, tragedy, suffering, to dwarf the wildest dream of Dante?"

Zacussec cleared his throat with a swallow of *vin blanc*.

"She'll come back to you after awhile," he said.

Badot shook his head in the best manner of Guitty.

"No, no—never! I have seen love too often, and never so clearly as when it is lost. This is no children's quarrel. A thousand times, when her pretty head has led her wandering from my side, my words have called her back; but now she is gone beyond the very reaches of my voice. She's in love with somebody else!"

"Oh, indeed!" said Zacussec. "That is serious."

He refilled his glass; but Badot was now well launched, and needed not even the guidance of a listener.

"Love, says Flauriot, is a battle. With my own weapons, I can fight. Against fair odds, I could have held her. She loved me, and no one else could come between us; but now my hands are tied, my tongue is mute, and I know not what to do."

"What's the matter?" asked Zacussec. "Is she in love with a millionaire?"

"Worse than that—he is a savage, a brigand, an outlander who knows not the manners of a gallant man. He does not speak—he makes love without words. He is an American."

"Oh, indeed!" said Zacussec. "That is very serious!"

"Figure yourself," Badot went on. "Lisette and I were dining at the Cave Voutée. There was music, and people were dancing. She and I, you know—we never dance. It is my mind and my heart that she must love, and not the way I move my feet. We sat in a corner far from the tu-

mult, and I was reading her a poem. I had copied it from Marcel Prévost, and it told how I burned with love for her. Her eyes were downcast and her thoughts were all of me. Then, suddenly, there comes this brute, big like a horse, and with the manners of a scurvy goat. Not a word to me, you understand! He turns his great back to me, holds out the hand to Lisette, and says:

"*Mademoiselle, voulez-vous to dance with me?*"

"As if she would want to dance when I was with her and my voice was in her ears! But poor Lisette, you know, always so kind and gentle—she cannot say no. So there they dance, he with his bear's paw around her, and she with her eyes tight closed, so as not to have to look upon the monster. When the music stops, he makes her sit down with him, and I am left alone to finish my poem and my Chartreuse. Finally I can stand it no longer, and I go to Lisette and tell her that I am waiting; but she is afraid to displease this colossus, and does not even dare to look at me. Then I speak to him. With a politeness he has never heard in his own country, I tell him that *mademoiselle* is my companion and must come with me. And what does he say? What does he say?"

"Run along, Frenchy, and fly your kite!"

"Figure yourself that. What can I do? I should have slapped him in the face, but my eyes were full of tears, and, like an idiot, I go by myself and leave my poor Lisette with this barbarian. Oh, the pig! The camel! And since then I have not seen her—or, if I have, he is always with her, and she does not dare to see me. So do you wonder, my friend, that my heart-strings jangle like a broken lute, and I have no appetite for *fritures?*"

For Zacussec, this recital had been merely the half heard accompaniment for his own thoughts, as he finished his meal and his bottle; but with thirst and hunger quieted, the other problems of his life began to seem less somber, and he found even a slight capacity for interest in the sorrows of his friend.

Lisette herself was sufficient warrant for his attention, for from their one meeting he retained a memory of that lady which needed no gilding by Badot or any other. Also, having had a disastrous morning in the study of human nature, he felt an im-

pulse to exercise, for a change, his other talents as counselor and guide.

"You have done well to confide in me," he said. "What appears to you as a catastrophe is in my experienced eyes the simplest of human foolishness. Women are mysteries only because men make them so. In reality the mind of a woman—"

But this revelation was never completed, for Badot suddenly sprang to his feet with a cry, sending his iron chair crashing back, and clutched the arm of Zacussec with the grip of a madman.

"Look!" he panted. "See there! I told you! I told you! See the brute, the animal!"

Zacussec followed the trembling finger, and received a shock which he concealed with difficulty. Standing at the far edge of the sidewalk, signaling to a taxi, stood a tall man and a pretty girl, arm in arm. The girl was Lisette, and the man was that same wolf in checked clothing who had so rudely shaken the faith of Zacussec only a few hours before.

Badot had recovered his chair, but not himself.

"*Pauvre petite!*" he spluttered. "My poor Lisette! You see, François, what can she do? Look at his shoulders! Look at those hands! I have not seen her for a week, and this assassin drags her with him to lunch and dinner, and—who knows where?"

"On my hundred francs!" thought Zacussec, with pardonable inaccuracy; but aloud he asked: "Is that, then, the cause of all your sorrow—that scarecrow with the padded coat and baby's face?"

The man had lifted the girl into their taxi, and they were being driven off. Badot followed them with his eyes like some one watching the departure of an ocean liner. When they were out of sight, he covered his face with his hands and abandoned himself to grief.

Zacussec felt little sympathy for his friend. The discovery that his enemy and Badot's were one and the same person, no matter how formidable that person, appeared in some way to simplify matters. In what way, he was not sure; but the situation seemed to offer to his peculiar talents some easy and profitable solution.

For a long time he stared in thought, heedless of the tableau of misery beside him. Then, as the expert senses of a safe breaker detect the delicate combination of

the lock, the answer to the problem slipped into his mind with a click, and his professional smile spread across his face.

He placed an arm over the bowed shoulders of his companion, and shook him gently.

"Come, Max!" he said. "Courage, *mon ami!* It is Fortune herself who staged this spectacle just now for our instruction. You have done well to confide in François Zacussec."

Badot raised his weary gaze.

"You are very kind," he said; "but do not try to cheer me. You have seen, just now. The man is a tyrant, a slave driver. You saw how helpless that little girl was in his hands. What can I hope to do against a man who makes love like a steam roller?"

"How little you know the world!" said Zacussec. "Only a minute ago you admit that all types are to me like the open pages of a book. Truly that is my *métier*—to know a man when I see him, as few men know their best friends. This *bête noire* of yours, this despoiler of true love, is in reality as simple and harmless as one of those animals to whom you so often compare him."

"What?" exclaimed Badot. "The man is irresistible, I tell you. Harmless? He is harmless like a locomotive. What weakness can you see in a block of stone like that?"

"Why," said Zacussec, "it is too simple. He is an American."

"I told you that," said Badot.

"But don't you see what that means? I know them, these Americans. In the battle they are courageous, in business they are smart, but in love they are fools. They know nothing of the fine points of love; and, as you should know, my dear Max, that is what counts with a woman. Your big friend of just now—in morals he is a Puritan, in action he is a caveman, but in love he is a boob!"

Badot sighed doubtfully.

"You may be right, but what good does that do me? Of what use are these fine points of love with a woman one never sees?"

Zacussec slapped his leg excitedly.

"There you are! That's my point. You must see her. For awhile, perhaps, she is carried away by the strength of this caveman; but if she should compare it to the subtlety of *your* love, Max, the delicacy of

your attentions, the poetry of your soul, neither Lisette nor any woman in the world could hesitate for two seconds between the man of iron and the man of fire."

"*Tiens!*" said Badot. "That is true, what you say; but when that man is there, my fire goes out, and he is always there. What can I do?"

"You are too modest. I know your feelings, but I know also the nature of the Anglo-Saxon. It is my business to know all natures. With his grim face, of course, you feel suppressed; but you must have courage. The great bulk of the elephant cannot resist the fury of the tiger. Before one blast of fiery anger, this iceberg of a lover would fade like snowflakes in the flame."

"H-m!" said Badot, rubbing his nose. "I am not so very fiery. True, I love Lisette; but, François, I am not a tiger."

"Oh, well!" Zacussec raised his shoulders high. "If that is the case, I can do no more. Advice I give you; but if you lack the spark here, in the heart, that I cannot inspire."

"No, no!" said Badot. "I understand what you say. I want to follow your advice; but I have so little knowledge of how to be furious."

"It is the simplest thing in the world," Zacussec assured him. "You find this Goliath with your Lisette. You walk up to him close and look him in the eye, like this."

"Yes, I understand," muttered Badot.

"You say to him, '*Monsieur*, you are a coachman and a merchant of tripe. You have the breeding of a hairless dog. This lady is affianced to me, and—'"

"But she isn't!" Badot groaned.

"Be quiet! You say, '*Monsieur*, if you are a man of honor, you will prove your intentions in fair combat with me. If you are the worm for which I take you, you will get out of my presence and never see this lady again!'"

Badot's face had fallen, and his eyes were those of a death mask.

"François," he said, "you are crazy! He would kill me. He would tear me in little pieces. He would—he would—you don't know that man!"

"No, but I know the type. They are fighters, these Americans, but not on the field of honor. They fight with their hands, like sailors. Of the rapier they are afraid."

"But so am I," said Badot gloomily.

"I have not fenced for ten years—not since I left the Lycée."

"What of it? The rapier is the national weapon of France. Challenge this man to a duel, and you will never see him again."

"I can promise you that," said Badot.

"It is merely a gesture," Zacussec explained. "Your bluff will be better than his bluff. At the mention of a duel he will think you are *Artagnan* himself. Max, think of Lisette! In her eyes you will be a hero forever, in the true colors of a gentleman of France."

"Ah!" said Badot, his eyes brightening for the first time. "That is true! I had not considered that. She will see that true love is fearless."

"Exactly," said Zacussec.

"And you are sure he will not fight?"

"He would not know how."

"She will see that a poet is always a hero, and a lover crossed is a demon roused."

"Now you're talking!" shouted Zacussec. "And," he added generously, "lest you should feel any fear at the last moment, I myself will accompany you."

"François," cried Badot, seizing his hand, "you are a genius, and my true friend! Garçon, bring me the *carte du jour*."

III

POCCADETTI first became famous for the variety and delicacy of the shellfish and sea food that he purveyed at his little restaurant in the Rue Gigot; but his financial success was chiefly based on his belief that there were other fishes at large as profitable as any in his ice chest. He provided a number of small rooms above his restaurant, where those of reclusive preference might share their *moules à l'Estragon* and *filets meunière* unobserved by any but the most discreet of waiters. An electric switch on the wall enabled one to flood each room in yellow, red, or blue light, or to leave it in darkness, according to one's temperament, and the windows were heavily curtained to exclude all jarring noises and any chance of ventilation.

Here were wont to meet the members of the not too eternal triangles that spice the life of Paris. Here the young *étudiant* would bring the latest sovereign of his heart, to lure her with the luxury at his command. Sometimes there would be a room reserved for *monsieur le directeur* of

the Grande Révue, who came to test the merits of the latest applicant for the chorus.

Poccadetti guarded tenderly the secrets of his erring patrons. Two wires unwisely crossed would burn themselves and also the reputation of his house, and therefore all were insulated. The proprietor's motto was discretion without valor.

On the night following the conference at the Chasse-Cafard, in the most sumptuous of these cells, with his elbows bridging the narrow table, sat Mr. Walter Clayson of Dallas, Texas, and, *vis-à-vis*, Lisette, late of the Galleries Lafayette.

The cloth, ringed with a rainbow record of the *carte des vins*, was cleared of all but two small coffee cups and two long-stemmed glasses of orange and green liqueurs. The conversation had waxed and waned with the menu, and was now modulated to that intimate pitch which befits the end of a well chosen feast.

This conversation, if not stimulating in its context, was doubly interesting in the way it was conducted; for each spoke entirely in his or her own language, with no attempt whatever at translation, and yet the exchanges were as sprightly and the laughter as spontaneous as if this cubicle at Poccadetti's had been the *salon* of Lady Montague.

It is impossible to say how this is done. Perhaps the code was devised when the American troops landed in France. Perhaps it originated at the first supper in Eden; but whatever the explanation, this language of tones and glances is so perfect and so efficient as to put to ridicule the sponsors of Esperanto.

Lisette was nibbling the edge of some bit of pastry, and Clayson was watching the play of the tiny teeth and vermilion lips.

"Gee, girly!" said Clayson. "You'd certainly win the glass toothpick as a cookie pusher! If you're still hungry, let's order something."

He picked up the bill of fare.

"*Non, non, Walter*"—she pronounced it "*Valtaire*"—" *je n'ai plus faim. Je fais seulement semblant de manger, parce que tu m'embarrasses quand tu me regardes comme ça.*"

"Embarrassed? I should say not!" Clayson answered. He got up and went around to her chair. Putting a hand on her shoulder, he said: "I'll show you how embarrassed I am, you little witch cat!"

He bent to prove his point; but Lisette never did find out, for angry voices were heard at the head of the narrow stairs, the door of the sanctum suddenly burst open, and Badot stood in the entrance, his pose lacking only the plumed hat and gauntlets of a musketeer.

"Now what the devil?" Clayson straightened up. "Who let you in here?" he demanded.

"Sir, my name is Badot — Maximilien Badot."

"That's a pretty terrible name," Clayson admitted.

"I come to demand that you release this lady."

"You what?" asked Clayson, puzzled. Then, to Lisette: "Say, who is this guy?"

Lisette merely shrugged her shoulders, and disapprovingly looked away. With berserk eyes, Badot stepped forward.

"Sir, this lady is my *fiancée*! I demand that you leave her at once, and never again to annoy her with your face of a baboon, or else you are a species of coward, and I will duel you with sabers and spit you in the stomach!"

"You will, will you?" Clayson growled. "Now you look here, you French sap—you beat it, hard! *Allez vite, heraus*, or I'll tell you what I'll do to you!"

Here he stopped. Badot had held his ground, though growing less tigerlike every minute; but in the doorway appeared Zacussec, bowing, his professional smile in full play. Clayson looked at the newcomer, then shoved both hands in his pockets, and leaned thoughtfully against the curtains of the window.

"Hello, gyp!" he said. "You're still at it, eh?"

Badot, like an actor for the first time without his book, turned for prompting to his friend.

"And now what shall I do?" he asked. In Zacussec's steady smile he found no help, but rather added cause for worry. "Sir!" he tried again, groping for his lost fury.

"Shut up!" said Clayson. "I've often heard of these little games back home, but I didn't think you birds over here were up to it. If you two crooks think that just because I'm a stranger in this town I'll fall for any stick-up like this, you lose!"

The Texan crossed the room, ignoring Badot, who was fuming darkly like a spent firework. He was stopped by the expres-

sion of Lisette, who was striving with every sense to guess the dénouement. He turned to her, sure that she understood him.

"As for you, girly, you're in a tough game. The sooner you quit it, the better for you. You're too young and too pretty and too good for this outfit!"

There was understanding in Lisette's eyes, but it didn't seem to be for him. In her practiced gaze the smiling stranger in the doorway held the center of the stage.

Clayson turned to Badot.

"Now, you! Next time you're looking for an easy mark, don't pick anybody from the United States—they know too much. And don't talk to me about sabers, you damned fool!"

He twisted one large hand in the collar of Badot's coat, the other took hold farther down, and the last disciple of *Artagnan* departed from the field of honor. Then Clayson took a hundred-franc note from his pocket and skimmed it to the table.

"There's for my stack, girly. You're in a darned good dinner, anyway!"

He picked up his hat and coat, and started toward Zacussec.

"And you, you bunk artist—next time I run into you it 'll be the house with the crowbar screens, and don't you forget it!"

But Zacussec had wisely vanished. With a last look at Lisette's placid face, Clayson turned and stamped downstairs.

The waiters of Poccadetti's, much too discreet to fight, now came to the door to compute the damage. Lisette, her back to the room, sipped her green liqueur. Za-

cussec entered and took command. He drew up Clayson's chair.

"I fear *mademoiselle* is upset," he said tenderly.

"Oh, no!" said Lisette. "Max always was a fool."

"He must love you very much," said Zacussec, sitting down.

"Perhaps he does," she sighed; "but he was always a fool. With his silly words, he tires me."

"And your poor friend, the American—doubtless his heart is broken, too."

"Poor Valtaire!" laughed Lisette. "He has such a violent temper!"

"Yes," said Zacussec. "It is my business to study characters."

"And then"—she shook her head—"he knows nothing of the fine points of love." Zacussec took soft hands in his.

"There are only a few of us who do," he said solemnly.

Then he caught sight of the hundred-franc note, where it had fallen on the floor. She seemed almost to smile at him, the warlike goddess to whom he had that very morning bid such a sad adieu.

"*Garçon!*" he called. "*L'addition, s'il vous plaît.*"

"But," said Lisette, wide-eyed, "*monsieur* is not going to leave me now?"

Zacussec looked at the bill for sixty francs which the waiter laid before him. Then he reached down and picked up the note.

"No, my darling," said he; "not now, nor ever. *Garçon*, bring us a quart of extra sec, and two glasses!"

TIME, THE ALCHEMIST

"THERE's no joy in the world!" 'Twas Childhood spoke,
And life's completest tragedy awoke.

"Love has slipped past me!" sorrowed rifled Youth;
There was no pity where there was no truth.

"I have lost faith!" Maturity made moan,
As she sat shivering in the dark alone.

Age wailed into the silence: "Hope is dead,"
And no hand came to stroke her low-bowed head.

A soul called unto Death: "Oh, thou most true,
To man unfailing, wilt thou flee me, too?"

But Time, the alchemist, said: "Follow me;
From all these evils I will set you free."

Elizabeth M. Montague

Plain People

THE STORY OF THE PRAGORS AND THE DIESELS, WHO TILLED
NEIGHBORING FARMS IN MONTANA

By Myron Brinig

AT fourteen Otilie Pragor became the head of a family, as well as the owner of a farm in Park County, Montana. Otilie's parents had both died while they were still under forty, and it fell to Otilie, as their eldest child, to manage things. There was a sister, Irma, two years younger than Otilie, and two small brothers, Jack and Carl, who had to go into Livingston every morning to attend school. Irma was the beauty of the family, and she had soft, white hands that Otilie always said she must "save."

"You're not to do any hard work," said Otilie, "because you got to save your hands."

So, instead of working on the farm and doing chores, Irma went to school and attended to the shopping.

Of course it was hard on Otilie; but there she was, the head of a family, and things had to be kept going, or they would all be sent off to the County Orphanage, which was an imposing building halfway between Livingston and Hunter's Hot Springs.

On her way past the orphanage, Otilie had often seen the children playing games in the sunshine; or, if it were winter, she heard them making great cries of delight as they coasted downhill on their sleighs. They were beholden to the county, these children, but at times there came to Otilie a secret feeling of envy, which she tried to suppress the moment she felt it rising in her. After all, it was better to have your own house and a farm, two cows and a dozen chickens, than to be dependent on the county for support. Besides, after a few years, with Irma and the boys educated, things would be much easier.

In the beginning, Otilie's hands had been even whiter and softer than Irma's.

Up to the time when her mother died, there had always been talk in the house of buying a piano for Otilie to take lessons on. Then the terrible winter had come when the snow drifted over the roof, and Otilie's mother had to be carried away to the hospital in town, where, a few days later, she died of "complications."

Otilie wasn't quite sure what these "complications" were. When she asked the doctor, he said something about "little girls wanting to know too much."

Otilie felt wronged. She wasn't little any more. She was fourteen and the head of a family, and she had to do all the work and see the children through school. Over-night she had become a drudge. When most girls were beginning to go to parties and dances, and to have beaux, Otilie Pragor was doing the work of a hardened peasant woman.

It would have been much harder but for Charlie Diesel. The Diesels owned the farm next to the Pragors, and they were somewhat better off, though by no means rolling in money. They had a father, but he was a paralytic. He sat in the kitchen all day, looking out of the window; and every evening, at ten o'clock, they had to carry him into his bedroom and put him to bed.

With their mother dead, and a paralytic father, you might just as well have called the Diesels orphans; but their lot was different from that of the Pragors, because there were two grown boys. Edward, who was eighteen, helped out after school, and Charlie, who was twenty, was as strong as an ox. There were also four or five very young Diesels, but of course they didn't count.

When things got a little beyond Otilie, she would call over Charlie Diesel, and he

would help out. He was handy with the ax, and was proud of the fact that during that terrible winter he had chopped more wood than any other fellow in the county. As a result, Charlie's shoulders bulged out in what Otilie referred to as "packages of muscle." He could lift a hencoop on his shoulders and carry it. He had done this very thing when Otilie complained that her coop was getting too much wind and snow.

"Well, I'll move it for you," Charlie had said, and to Otilie's utter astonishment he had lifted the coop on his shoulders.

"It isn't like he was human, almost," Otilie had said to her younger sister that evening.

Irma had only smiled condescendingly. She thought Charlie an "awful boob."

"Why shouldn't he be strong?" asked Irma. "He's got no brains!"

Otilie resented Irma's slur on Charlie, but she had to admit that he wasn't very quick-witted. The younger brother, Edward, had the brains in the Diesel family. He was in his last year at high school, and in September he was going to the university at Missoula, to take up law.

Edward was very different from Charlie. Charlie was squat and lumpy, and looked something like a huge ape. His wrists were covered with black hair, and the Pragors had never seen him dressed in anything but tattered coveralls. Edward was tall and slender, and had graceful little mannerisms. The way he had of brushing his blond hair back from his forehead, like a girl, was charming. He was a figure of light and air, while Charlie seemed always to be groping through the mud, carrying heavy things on his great shoulders.

II

ONE June morning Charlie Diesel knocked on the Pragors' kitchen door. When Otilie saw him, she felt sorry for him. He was dressed up. He had on a new suit that he had bought at the Palace Furnishings in Livingston. It was too tight for him, and the coat had already begun to give way in the back, where Charlie's muscles showed like great ridges through the coarse stuff. He had on a stiff collar, too, and its pointed edges were making him suffer, because Otilie could see the sweat on his neck.

"Why, Charles!" gasped Otilie. "What ever?"

"Miss Otilie, my brother Ed's graduating from the high school, and he said he'd drive us to Livingston for the exercises. He's making a speech what he's been learning these last three weeks, and he's going to get a diploma."

"Oh, how wonderful!" said Otilie.

Again, when she saw Charlie Diesel looking into her eyes with a kind of dumb suffering, she felt sorry. She realized that with three words she had given herself away. It must be plain to Charlie that she was in love with Edward. To cover her confusion, she ran to the oven, brought out a pan of freshly baked cookies, and asked Charlie to sit down and try one, with a glass of milk.

"You're looking very nice," she told him.

Irma, who had just caught sight of the visitor, burst into uncontrollable laughter and ran from the room, almost hysterical. Charlie, who had taken a bite out of the cooky, put it aside and looked tortured.

"I can't think what Irma finds so funny," said Otilie. "Do finish the cooky!"

"I suppose I look like a reg'lar dummy," said Charlie; "but you ought to see Ed. He's bought an evening dress suit."

A picture of Edward, with his clear, rosy skin and his fair hair, rose before Otilie, and her heart began to beat hard. She forgot that Charlie was in the room. She forgot that she was supporting a family on her frail shoulders. She stood for a moment bewitched in that hot, steaming kitchen.

She was seeing herself and Edward as they walked down the church aisle, man and wife. He had on his "evening dress suit," and from time to time he would brush away from his forehead the soft, fair hair that was like silk spun from sunshine. She was dressed in white—white silk with a sort of fairy netting over it, and white satin slippers, and in her hair was one white rose; and a veil fell from the top of her head to her feet that was like the mist from the falls in the cañon of the Yellowstone.

"You certainly can cook!" Charlie Diesel's voice broke in. "It's a treat to come over here an' eat the things you make! Well, Ed an' me 'll be over with the gig about six o'clock."

Charlie was going toward the door, and Otilie, wrenched from her daydream, could

not help comparing this awkward, ugly boy with his graceful brother. She noticed the sweat on Charlie's neck, which was beginning to discolor his collar, and she saw the matted black hair on his wrists, so unlike the white, girlish wrists of Edward. She was sick for a moment, and then a thought that came to her mind made her afraid.

Charlie Diesel supported his brother, and was seeing him through school, just as she was supporting her sister Irma. Charlie toiled from morn to night, chopping, carrying, doing the work of five men, just as she, Otilie, toiled and did the work of five women. Charlie was spending himself for Edward and the younger Diesels, just as she was spending herself for Irma and her two small brothers.

"Good-by," said Charlie from the doorway, and looked at her like a dumb animal in pain.

But Otilie turned away from him with a stifled cry, and ran into her bedroom. She lifted the window shade, to see herself in the mirror. She was afraid, afraid!

Some day, after a few more years of this life, she would be ugly, just as Charlie Diesel was ugly. Her skin, which was still fresh and youthful, would be dried up and wrinkled. Her young body would be awkward from bending and carrying. She would be an old woman. What right had she to feel sorry for Charlie Diesel, she who was a bearer of burdens just as he was? In a few years would Edward's eyes brighten at the sight of her? Or would he laugh and turn away from an old woman, coarse, stooped, with red, heavy hands?

Standing in front of the mirror, with anguish in her eyes, Otilie became aware of another reflection peering over her shoulder. The face was much like her own, but fresher and fuller. There was the brightness of youth in the eyes, and a smile on the lips. Irma! Irma's hands were white and soft as she lifted them to fix her abundant, shining hair.

"Why, Irma!" Otilie turned about, fearing that her secret anguish was known to her younger sister. "You ought not to steal behind me that way. You gave me a fright."

"Well, it does seem funny to see you looking in the mirror," laughed Irma. "You never seem to have time to do such vain things. You're coming with us to see Ed graduate, aren't you, Otilie?"

"Why, of course I am," replied Otilie.

She could see by Irma's expression that her younger sister was disappointed.

"You'd better fix your hair," said Irma.

"It looks a fright, so steamy and coarse."

"That's because I work for you," it was on the tip of Otilie's tongue to answer; but she restrained herself.

She ran out to the pump, to draw water, and her tears fell into the bucket as she thought of the things she had been about to say to her sister. Ah, there was no doubt about it now! She was in love with Edward Diesel, she who must look after the family and toil and scrub and "save" Irma's white hands!

III

THE Diesels and the Pragors occupied a whole row in the opera house where the graduation exercises took place, and the younger children became unruly because Edward did not speak until the close of the evening. Charlie Diesel fidgeted about in his seat, looking painfully like an animal that is chained and cannot get away to the freedom of the woods and fields. It was Otilie who told the children to keep quiet when the people in the row in front turned about in vexation, and it was Otilie who packed them off to a motion picture show after the exercises had been completed.

Irma had been excited about the motion picture until she learned that Charlie, and not Edward, was to be her escort. She pouted and walked off angrily by herself, calling back that she would spend the night in town with a school chum. When Edward said good-by to her, she would not answer.

Edward and Otilie were alone for a few hours. It was a warm evening, following a chill and dilatory spring. The automobiles that soon would be filling the town with a foreign atmosphere, on their way to Yellowstone Park, were still absent, and the streets had a vacant appearance.

Edward and Otilie walked side by side in the direction of the river on the outskirts of the town. Edward had on his dress suit, and his patent leathers made him gleam resplendently as he walked along, so that people turned to stare. Under one arm he carried his diploma.

By his side, Otilie felt shabby and awkward. She was wearing her best dress, but it had been made two years before, and she had outgrown it. It was Irma who had worn a new dress for Edward's graduation

—a dress that Otilie had made from materials purchased at the department store.

They passed the store now. The windows were brightly lit, and displayed wedding dresses, with a sign:

FOR JUNE BRIDES

Otilie stopped to look at the exhibit, while Edward waited at her side. They were so beautiful, these dresses—white silk, with a fairylike netting over them; and there were veils, like the spray of the Yellowstone Falls.

"Oh, how beautiful!" sighed Otilie, and then she noticed that Edward was blushing.

They walked on, under the trees, and from near by came the sound of the rushing river, but lately freed from the ice of the long Montana winter. Edward took Otilie's arm and pressed her fingers.

"I'm going to Missoula in September," he said suddenly. "I suppose you know I'm going to study law?"

"Oh, Edward, that's just fine!" replied Otilie. "Just think how fine it is to be able to go to the university! I'm going to send Irma there when she graduates from high school."

"You're a fine girl, Otty!" Edward brushed his hair back from his forehead—the hair that was like sunlight, even now in the dark. "It's not every girl that works as hard as you do. You know, Otty, I've always liked you. I was thinking that after I graduate from college, or maybe before, we—we could be married."

Then it was all true as she had dreamed it—the two of them walking down the church aisle, she in the wedding dress with a long veil like mist from the falls! She was going to be Ed's wife—the wife of this young man who was as a prince amongst them. He was so slender and tall, and his hands were so graceful and white! She pressed them, and thought suddenly of other hands—Charlie's hands, scarred and huge, with black hair growing on the wrists and between the knuckles.

She felt that she must speak of Charlie.

"He works so hard!" she said. "After you've made money at law, you'll help him out, won't you, Ed?"

"Charlie's been great to me," answered Edward. "Ever since pa's been paralyzed, Charlie's done all the work on the farm. When I wanted to stay home and help him, he wouldn't have it. He said that one of

us had got to go to school and be somebody, and it must be me, because I had the brains. You bet I'll pay him back some day! And I hope Irma will appreciate what you're doing for her, Otty."

"Isn't she getting to be right pretty, Ed? Have you noticed what white soft hands she has? Before mamma died, she told me to take care of Irma, and to see that she saved her hands."

Of a sudden, Otilie became depressed. She was thinking that Edward must be comparing her own coarse hands with Irma's; but Edward bent forward without warning and kissed her lips, and Otilie forgot everything else. Life was worth living. It was worth while to work all day, to support the children, to send them off to school, just to have this reward—this kiss of Edward's, this beautiful prelude to their marriage.

It must have been for a long time that they wandered through the dark woods, under the tall trees by the rushing river. It was the same river that journeyed on and on for miles and became a part of the Yellowstone, falling at last like a wedding veil into the jeweled gorge of the cañon. When she and Edward were married, they must go through the Yellowstone on their honeymoon, not staying at the gorgeous hotels, but camping under the trees, under the sharply sweet pines, so brave and fine, so wildly free! Otilie was released from all cares and all thoughts of work, thinking of her life as it would be when she was Edward's wife.

And then from behind them came footsteps, and they turned around and saw Charlie staring at them. Edward removed his arm from about Otilie's waist, but Charlie had seen, and in his eyes there was a look of abject, profound despair.

"I came to get you," said Charlie. "It's time we were going home."

"How was the moving picture, Charlie?" asked Otilie. "Did you enjoy it?"

"Oh, it was pretty good," answered Charlie; "but parts of it I couldn't get through my head. It was about society people, and they acted so funny, and I couldn't get it through my head. I was thinking all the time, 'To-morrow that fence has got to be mended. To-morrow I got to get those new screens for the kitchen.'"

"I'll attend to that, Charlie," said Edward. "I'll get the screens."

"No, you'd better not, Ed. You'd better study up for the entrance examinations you told me about. I guess they'll be pretty hard. You better let me 'tend to the screens."

"Say, Charlie!" Edward glanced significantly at Otilie. She nodded her head, and a flush came to her cheeks. "Charlie, I want to tell you something."

"I know—you're going to be married," said Charlie.

Then, with a terrific abruptness, he burst out sobbing and ran ahead of them, heavily, clumsily, like an animal that has been wounded.

By the time they were all packed in the gig, Charlie was stolid and indifferent. His interest was in the horses.

"G'dap!" he said. "You, there, Bess!" Otilie regarded him in wonder.

IV

WHEN Irma graduated from high school, Otilie said that she must go to the university and study music. Besides, Edward had written that there were courses in the college that would be fine for a girl like Irma. For a week the girls shopped in Livingston, and Otilie helped her sister to pick out her dresses. The crops that year were good, and quite a bit of money had been laid by.

Otilie drew a hundred dollars from the bank for Irma's school clothes, but the younger sister did not spend quite that much; and one day Otilie could not resist some white silk material and veiling that she saw in the department store. She hid her purchases until Irma had gone, and then she set about making her wedding dress.

After her day's work in the house and on the farm, Otilie would sit late at the sewing machine. The two younger brothers, seeing the light in her room, scolded her, and wanted to know if she was ever going to bed. They did not like to see their eldest sister looking so pale and worn. They wrote a long letter about it to Irma, in Missoula, but she was too busy to answer except on a postal card, scribbling:

Love to all.

Early in the spring Otilie was busy in the fields with a hired man. Her hands were always black with the soil, and her face had a wind-blown appearance. Charlie Diesel helped her a good deal of the time,

and Otilie could not help feeling that he was neglecting his own work just to be with her.

Together, behind the plow, they marched up and down the land, a man and woman yoked to the same load. To see them coming toward you out of the limitless horizon was to see a pair of mortals who had sprung from the loins of the earth, with the glistering black loam clinging to their heavy shoes, and the sun in their eyes. You would see them, tiny specks in the wilderness of land, and the sky seemed to be crushing them down, down under the plowed soil to the very center of the earth. Their bodies ached from incessant toil, and their hands were large and red and blistered from driving and hauling and plowing and planting.

It was too much for a girl to stand indefinitely. Late in the spring Otilie had an attack of the grippe, and was forced to take to her bed. It was inconvenient, because her brothers had to get their own breakfasts in the morning, and Otilie, from her bedroom, heard them breaking dishes and quarreling with each other.

"Boys!" she cried. "I do declare! Can't you get off to school without my help—big boys like you? I do declare!"

It was impossible to get a girl to help her out, because that would have meant cutting off a slice from Irma's school allowance. Otilie knew how her younger sister loved nice clothes, and how she liked to show them off before her friends.

Then, too, Otilie was worried lest the hired man, an illiterate Serb, should be doing everything the wrong way. It was fortunate that Charlie Diesel was always near by to oversee things. There were two hired men on the Diesel farm, and Charlie trusted them well enough to leave them alone while he did Otilie's work.

It was toward the end of Otilie's convalescence, and she was sitting up in bed reading a letter from Edward. He was not coming home this summer, but was taking work in a Missoula law office instead.

"There's nothing like getting into the practical work," he wrote.

He inclosed a new photograph of himself, with his blond hair plastered back from his white forehead. Otilie placed the photograph beside her on the pillow and began to cry. She was crying for a long time, and then she fell asleep.

When she awakened, it was late twilight,

and there was a sound of rain outdoors. She turned her eyes this way and that, and saw Charlie standing in one corner of the room, looking at her. For a moment she was astonished. She had never believed that such a look could be in Charlie's eyes. They were large and shining, and had strange glints of beauty. She saw the land, the sky, the clouds in them.

"Why, Charlie!"

"I thought I'd come and see how you're getting on," he said. "We got your hen-house repaired to-day, and I'm going to have it wired, so's you'll get more eggs. It's storming now, but the rain never lasts in these parts."

"Charlie, you're so good to me, I can't never think how I'll repay you for all you've done! I'm sure your pa must be mad as fury the way you're neglecting your own farm."

"Oh, pa, he don't mind. I see you got a picture of Ed on your pillow."

Ottile remembered, and blushed a little. She held the picture up for Charlie's inspection.

"It's a good likeness," she said; "only he looks older, and sort of strange, with his hair that way. He's not coming home this summer—did you know?"

"He wrote me something like that. Well, I guess, if he's goin' to be a lawyer, he might as well start practicing now as later; only I could never stand an office myself."

"It's certainly fine of you to support Ed through school," said Ottile. "We sure will appreciate what you've done, Charlie!"

"Oh, that! It ain't nothing." He laughed shortly. "Why, what am I good for but working? I like it. It's just the way you said. I wouldn't be anywheres else but out there—in the field."

The fields made her think of her hands, so rough, so brown. She raised them for a critical examination, and shuddered.

"I was kind of thinking of going into Livingston and having my picture taken, to send to Ed," she murmured; "but I guess I'll have to wait now. What with being sick and all, I must look a poor sight!"

"There's nothing the matter with your looks," Charlie told her.

"Oh, you see me every day, and maybe you haven't noticed how old I'm getting." She laughed wistfully. "Ed, he'd see in a

minute. I used to be quite pretty when Ed was around."

"Well, you still are," he said doggedly.

"Poor Charlie! Here you come in to keep me company, and I got a blue fit on. I'm sorry. Maybe it's the rain; but it 'll soon be summer, and the park will be open, and people from all over the country will be driving past on the road out there. I often watch them—cars from New York, and Illinois, and California, all on their way to the Yellowstone. It's a wonderful place! When I was five years old, my mother took me there. I remember the geysers, and the falls like veils—"

"You're crying, Ottile! I don't like to see you cry."

"Well, I guess I got to cry sometimes, don't I? You can thank your lucky stars that you're not a woman. Listen, Charlie—when me and Ed are married, you'll come to stay with us for a long rest. I'm sure Ed will want it."

"Oh, maybe!"

"And thank you ever so much for coming in to see me. I feel so much better that I'll sure be up to-morrow. There's lots to be done." She rattled off a number of things that had been forced into the background since her illness. "Irma'll soon be coming home, and I got to have the floor in her room painted, and to see about new wall paper. A college girl like Irma has got to have everything dainty. She's got to be saved all these bothers."

"I wouldn't worry about Irma, if I was you," said Charlie.

"Why, Charlie! What ever do you mean?"

"Well," he replied, shuffling awkwardly on his feet, "what I mean is, Irma's old enough to take care of herself now, what with an education and—"

"Charlie, she's just a baby! You don't understand. There's some things you can't get through your head."

Ottile saw that she had offended him, and reached out for his hand; but he was embarrassed.

"I'll bring in the wood for you," he said.

She heard him moving in and out of the kitchen, stacking the logs in neat piles by the stove, shaking the grate, and emptying the ashes. After a few minutes she stood by the window and saw him disappearing down the road in the direction of his own farm.

The rain had ceased, and a curious trick

of the sun made Charlie loom up heroic as he marched away. He seemed taller, and there was an unexpected beauty about his body moving freely along the road.

Ottillie had forgotten Edward's picture. A few minutes later, when she picked the photograph off the floor, she upbraided herself, and wondered how she could have been so careless.

V

AFTER the dreary winter and spring, June opened her treasure chest of warm days. The meadows sprang to fresh green life, and ripened and blossomed. Out on the Yellowstone Trail, cars from every State, from Maine to California, began to speed past on their way to the park.

Irma had written that she was coming home to spend her vacation, and Ottillie busied herself painting the floors of the house, scrubbing the windows, and selecting new wall paper for Irma's room. She inspected her handiwork with pleasure. The house had never looked so well, not even when her father and mother were alive. Irma's room was refreshing and dainty—the sort of room that could not fail to please a girl who had spent a year in a college town.

On the morning of the day when Irma was to return, Ottillie rose early and went about her duties with a song on her lips. She fed the chickens, churned butter, gathered the eggs in the henhouse, and put the finishing touches to Irma's room. She had gathered bunches of wild flowers, and their fragrance made the air lyrical with the perfume of the outdoors.

Ottillie was filled with a sense of release, almost of ecstasy, now that summer was here. She longed to see her sister again, to take Irma in her arms and mother her. There would be so much to talk about! Irma would bring home new ideas. It would be like letting sunlight into a room that has been dark and musty for many months.

Moreover—Ottillie's heart leaped at the thought—Irma would speak of Edward, would report how he was looking, and all that he was doing in his new law office. Ottillie's song grew louder as she hitched the horses to the wagon, and motorists on their way to the Yellowstone leaned out from their seats to greet her as they passed.

Ottillie arrived in Livingston a full half hour before Irma's train. She tied the

horses to a hitching post near the station, and went off to buy a box of candy that Irma would enjoy on the way back.

The clerk in the candy store knew Ottillie and asked her questions about the farm, and about Irma and Edward.

"Heard from him lately?" he inquired.

When Ottillie blushed, he made a joke about married life that he had heard the evening before at the vaudeville show. Ottillie did not mind. She walked up and down the street across from the station for a time, and amused herself by looking in the windows of the stores. She wondered if Irma had changed much, and what she would be wearing.

Five minutes before the train would arrive, Ottillie was in the station, waiting. In one hand she held two roses that she had purchased from the florist's, and under her arm was the box of candy. The station—the most imposing in Montana—was alive with chatter and laughter. People coming from the park, or going into it, were on all sides, exchanging observations and recounting experiences. From one end of the waiting room came the interminable *tickety-tick, tickety-tick* of the telegraph instrument, a joyous language that filled Ottillie Pragor with a curious consciousness of well-being.

Then the train rushed into the station, and Ottillie scanned the coaches for a sight of her sister. She did not see Irma, though she walked up and down from one end of the platform to the other. She began to feel anxious. She hurried through the station, looking everywhere, and then made her way to the street, thinking that Irma might have passed unobserved in the crowd; but the horses were growing in the sunshine, and the wagon was empty.

Ottillie was suddenly plunged into a mood of depression and futility. The station was beginning to look empty, and the brightness and color had departed. From one end of the waiting room came the racket of the telegraph instrument, *tickety-tick, tickety-tick*, and each separate long or short sound became detached, and somehow oppressive, to Ottillie. What were these messages being broadcast throughout the land, and why did the staccato sounds fill her with trembling and fear?

The next train from Missoula would not arrive until evening. Ottillie began to feel more hopeful at the thought that Irma might have missed the earlier train. She

decided to drive back to the farm and return later in the day.

What was the use of all this worry? There was nothing to feel anxious about, for Irma was perfectly capable of taking care of herself; yet Otilie could not regain the happiness that had been hers earlier in the day. She felt that something inestimably precious had escaped her—something that she would never be able to recapture. She carefully placed her two roses on the seat beside her, and began to urge the horses out of the town, along the dusty road.

She was reflecting, as she drove back, that her hands were now ugly and scarred beyond all hope of beauty. She noticed her feet on the dashboard, in her large and heavy shoes, so different from Irma's shapely and slender feet. Her shoulders felt bent and tired, her chest looked sunken, and her limbs ached from the work she had been doing all week.

As a cloud obscured the sun and cast the world into a momentary grayness, Otilie wondered why she had always labored so hard. She had made herself old and ugly before her time, and with what result, what reward?

She was so much absorbed in her introspection that she did not hear, at first, the voice that was calling her from behind.

"Otilie! Otilie!"

When the voice penetrated into her consciousness, she lifted her head and looked behind her sharply. Coming toward her she saw a man in a buggy, and in a minute she made out Charlie Diesel. It was always Charlie, it seemed, who came to clear her mind, to cast her doubts away. It was always Charlie with whom her life was bound. They were like oxen drawing at the same load.

As he drew up beside her on the edge of the road, she saw how his face was streaked with sweat, and how his wrists and knuckles were covered with black hairs.

"I tried to find you there in town, but you'd gone," he explained, climbing out of his buggy and joining her on the seat of the wagon. "I got to tell you something, Otilie."

His voice had a curiously thin and faltering sound.

"What is it, Charlie? What you got to tell me?"

There was a desperate note in her questioning, and she found that she had gone

tired and cold again, and that her hands were trembling.

"A telegram from Edward," Charlie said.

Otilie remembered the *tickety-tick* of the telegraph instrument, insistent, monotonous, broadcasting messages over the land. She remembered how at first the sound had been a happy one in her ears; but now it was full of dread and terror.

Charlie reached into his pocket and brought out a yellow envelope. He handed the telegram over to Otilie without a word, and she read it. She handed it back.

"They were married last night, Edward and Irma," said Charlie. "They've gone to the park on their honeymoon. I thought it would come sooner or later. I told you not to worry about Irma. Why, Otty, what's the matter?"

She had slipped down on the seat. Her eyes were closed, and her face was like a mask, utterly robbed of color.

"Otty!" He pulled her up, laid her head on his shoulder, and stroked her hands gently. "There! There!"

"Edward!" she murmured. "Edward and Irma!"

"Sit up, Otty! Don't act this way! It hurts to see you acting this way. Sit up—there's a good girl!"

She remembered Edward vividly. She remembered the blond hair that gleamed like sunlight, even when all was dark about her. He was so tall, so slender, so graceful, and that way he had of lifting his hand to brush the hair back from his high, white forehead!

Then, opening her eyes, she caught sight of Charlie's wrists, large, ugly, covered with matted black hairs.

"Get away from me!" she cried, and her voice broke in hysteria. "Get away from me, you ape! You monkey! You! You!"

He drew back from her, and great pools of pity gleamed in his eyes, like those of a faithful dog.

"Don't touch me!" she cried. "Will you go? Will you go?"

For a moment he sat stupefied. Then he lifted himself heavily from the wagon and returned to his own buggy.

"I didn't mean to hurt you, Otilie," he mumbled.

Otilie had lifted the reins and was lashing her team with the whip.

"I don't ever want to see you again!"

she cried. "You're so ugly! Who would want you? You clod! You clod!"

The horses sprang forward down the road, and she held on to the reins, her body broken and twisted by sobs.

By the time she reached the farmhouse, her hysteria had passed its violent stage, and she set about unhitching and stabling the horses in a mechanical way. She even went up to the loft, to pitch down hay into the stalls; but there seemed to be no life in her body. Her nerves, so shaken and troubled at the first shock, were now numb, paralyzed. Her hands hung limply by her sides. She lifted her feet, and they were heavy, without a spring, without a lilt.

She entered the house and went into her own bedroom. After a few minutes she saw that there were two roses clutched in her hand. She could not remember having taken them from the wagon, but their fragrance, their beauty, unlocked something within her. She threw herself on the bed and wept furiously, piteously.

Her two small brothers could hear her sobs, wrenched up from the very bottom of her heart. They knocked timidly upon her door, but she ordered them away.

Presently her sobs grew quieter. She could hear the cars on the road outside the farmhouse, rushing along to Gardiner, and from Gardiner through the big gate into the Yellowstone. Happy people! Happy places! Mammoth, Old Faithful, the cañon, the falls like a wedding veil!

Suddenly she sat up in bed and began to weep audibly again. She staggered to her feet, went over to the wardrobe, and brought out the wedding dress she had made, night after night, stitching, stitching at the sewing machine. The dress was of white silk, overlaid with a delicate netting, and the wedding veil was like the ethereal foam of the Yellowstone Falls that sweep grandly, beautifully into the jeweled gorge. She held the useless thing in front of her and regarded it, and was stabbed through by new griefs, new agonies.

Slowly, methodically, she washed all signs of tears from her face and tidied her hair, which had become disarranged. She took off her clothes and donned the wedding dress. She could not understand why she did this. Perhaps it was because she felt so utterly miserable, so futile, and because the dress was the culminating height of her tragedy.

Pictures came to her mind that made her

sway and pull at the knuckles of her fingers in pain. She saw Edward and herself marching down the church aisle. He wore his dress suit and his gleaming patent leathers; she was beautiful and sweetly young, with her veil floating behind her head like a benediction.

She saw Edward and herself at Old Faithful, watching the geyser shoot up so radiantly, so swiftly, into the blue sky. Happiness was like that. Suddenly, without preparation, it shot up and was at its height; then it dropped back into the earth, and all was still and dead.

VI

OTILIE threw herself into the work on the farm, that summer, with her whole heart and body, in an endeavor to forget. Her brothers helped to gather the crops and sell them; and when autumn came it was decided that the Pragors should move to Livingston to spend the winter. The two boys would go to school, and Otilie would keep house for them.

A winter on the farm would have meant enduring another rigorous onslaught of zero weather and deep snow, and Otilie felt that she was no longer capable of facing these discomforts alone. There would always be unhappy memories with her—memories of Edward calling early in the morning, before he set out for high school, sitting down at her table for a cup of hot coffee. There would be memories of Edward driving down the road in his sleigh, the bells tinkling merrily in the frosty air. And now he was forever gone, and she would be alone—bitterly, coldly alone. She could not bear that loneliness on the farm, that silence shutting her up like a nun, away from warmth and love.

In Livingston, Otilie made a comfortable home for her younger brothers. After a few months it was decided that she should live in town until the boys were graduated from school. This meant selling the farm, and at first Otilie would not hear of it.

She wrote to Irma for advice, and the younger sister encouraged her to sell. The farm meant nothing to Irma now. Indeed, it had never been the home she would have chosen. She was living in Missoula, where Edward was working in a law office and attending college in the evening. If there were regrets over the sudden marriage, Irma never mentioned them. She wrote only of happiness.

Ottilie put the farm up for sale through a local land agent, though in doing so it seemed that she was turning traitor to her dearest dreams. After about a month a buyer was found, and the farm passed into other hands. Ottilie had never heard the name of Thompson before in that part of the country, but the agent assured her that the Thompsons were to be trusted. She did not even meet these people, but received her check through the agent.

It was not so bad, that winter in town, living in a warm and comfortable house; but when spring came, Ottilie was filled with a longing for the land. One evening in May, when the boys returned home from school, they found their sister in tears.

"Why, Otty, what's the matter?" they wanted to know.

"It's the farm," she sobbed. "I belong there. It was a mistake to sell it!"

"Well, there's nothing to cry about," Carl, the youngest, consoled her. "We can go out there for a picnic on Saturday. These people won't mind our coming back, if it's only for a day."

"Do you think so, Carl?" asked Ottilie. She dried her eyes and looked happy for a moment. "Oh, you don't know how much I'd like to be there now, with the ice melting in the river and the leaves coming on the trees! It's in the spring you miss the country the most."

It was six months since she had left the farm, since she had last seen Charlie Diesel; and on the following Saturday, as she drove back to the farm with her two brothers, Ottilie was thinking of the meeting on the road when she had called Charlie an ape and a clod.

How could she have abused him so, this man who had worked so hard to send his brother to college? If he was a clod, was she not one, too? Were they not both of the soil, wedded to the same land that had given them bread and meat and life? A winter in town had not changed her. She knew that she belonged out of doors, under this spring sky, these fleecy white clouds.

Ottilie's heart was beating wildly as the county bus drew up before the farmhouse. After the vehicle had gone, she whispered to her brothers:

"You knock at the back door, and see if they won't let us look around. Tell them that we used to live here."

Ottilie waited outside the gate. She removed her hat and felt the breeze caress-

ing her hair—the fresh, wild breeze of the fields. How she had missed it all, the routine of farm life, the silence and beauty of the land!

She was lost in this sad reverie when her brothers returned with smiles on their faces—something mysterious in those smiles!

"The Thompsons said it would be all right, Otty," they told her. "Mr. Thompson would like to see you."

Her hand trembled on the knob of the door. When she entered, she saw that the kitchen was empty. It occurred to her that this was very strange. Perhaps Mr. Thompson was awaiting her in the bedroom. Curious that she had never heard of the man who had bought her farm!

As she entered the room that had once been her own, she saw a man lying in bed, with his thick black hair ruffled and tangled on the pillow. She saw his hands above the coverlet—strong, brown hands; and she noticed the wrists covered with a matting of black hair.

"Charlie!"

The cry broke from her lips before she was aware of having spoken.

As he turned his eyes toward her, she saw that it was indeed Charlie, and she stepped back to the door, bewildered.

"I thought that Mr. Thompson—why, Charlie, what are you doing here?"

He regarded her as if she were a figure in a dream, beyond his reach.

"I live here," he answered. "I didn't like the idea of strangers living here after"—he faltered—"after all this must have meant to you, Otty."

"You're Mr. Thompson?" asked Ottilie, and her voice quivered. "Well, Charlie, I—I better be going, then."

On her way out she recalled the pain in his eyes, and the strange fact that he was in bed at this time of the day. She turned back.

"You sick, Charlie?"

"Oh, it ain't nothing serious, I guess. One of the horses threw me the other day, and I was sort of shaken up."

She was immediately all concern.

"I'm so sorry!" she cried. "You just lie still, Charlie, and I'll make you some beef broth." She paused for a moment, and then went on: "Charlie, I guess I used some expressions I didn't mean that day. Honest, I didn't mean anything. I just lost my head."

"Well, I'm a fool in a lot of ways," said

Charlie. "I guess I ain't got much tact. I only went through the sixth grade."

"I went through the fifth, and then mother died," mused Otilie; "but what of that. I'd like to know? Some people have fine educations, and some—"

"Some are clods," said Charlie.

"But that don't mean they ain't as fine as silk," whispered Otilie. "You, for instance, Charlie—you buying this farm and everything. I don't think there's a finer man than you anywhere in the world! It's just in you, and nobody could change it. You're just good!"

"Aw, Otilie!"

"Goodness me, Charlie, here you are with just one blanket in this cold room! Where do you keep your bedclothes?"

There were some blankets in the closet, he said, at the other end of the room. She opened the closet door, and, as she reached for the blankets on the top shelf, one of his suits fell to the floor. She picked it up carefully, and saw that it was a black tuxedo. Charlie with a black tuxedo!

"Why, this is a nice suit!" she cried. "I never knew you had a suit like this, Charlie!"

"Aw, it ain't much," he laughed.

"When did you buy it?"

"Oh, a long time ago, when there was—hope."

At first she did not quite catch what he said, he had spoken so softly. Then she turned about and saw that his eyes were filled with anguish. Because she, too, had suffered, she was carried away by his own tragedy.

She with her wedding gown, he with his tuxedo! Charlie, too, had dreamed his

dreams. There had been a day when he had hung his wedding suit in the closet and turned away in agony. How parallel their lives were! At every turn she found him waiting for her, and all her sorrows were his.

"I bought it before you an' Edward—" he started to say.

"You thought maybe that you and me might get married?" she asked, as she brought the blanket to his bed and spread it over him.

"Well, yes, if you ask me; but I know that you don't love me, Otilie. It's all right!" He laughed unnaturally. "The suit's too small for me now; but you know how it is—sometimes you keep a thing just for the looks of it."

"Seems to me you could have it altered so's it would fit, couldn't you, Charlie?"

Suddenly she broke down and wept. She buried her head on the pillow beside him, and cried for the fool she had been—the fool who had wanted dross when within reach there had been pure gold. She stood up hastily, wiped her eyes, and arranged her hair.

"Excuse me, Charlie—crying this way, like a baby! Ain't it the limit? I'll go and make your broth."

She started from the room.

"The pants are all right, an' I can get a tailor in Livingston to let out the sleeves," Charlie was saying.

Otilie was stirred by a certain quiver of exaltation that had crept into Charlie's voice. She was thinking that they would spend their honeymoon in the Yellowstone, where Old Faithful rises swiftly, radiantly, into the blue sky.

I WONDER IF YOU KNEW

THE room, the color of woods in autumn, holds

More meaning now, since you have let me share

The intimacy of its browns and golds;

I have made friends with hearth and book and chair,

Peeped into corners, touched things, found delight

In simple order, loving every small

Treasure that has won favor in your sight—

But loving your dear presence best of all!

I shall not soon forget the dress you wore,

The twinkling candles and the way time flew.

Snow had come sifting in against the door;

And then good night! I wonder if you knew,

When your warm hand met mine, the thoughts that lay

Near to my heart—the words I could not say!

Leslie Nelson Jennings

Intestate

AFTER A LONG LIFE OF DEVOTION TO AN IDEAL, ALL THAT
ELDA GREENLEAF HAD TO LEAVE WAS A SYMBOL

By Frances Howe Miller

IT was well enough known among her friends that Elda Greenleaf had given up a moderately absorbing love affair, and a reasonable prospect of domestic comfort, to the exactions of her muse. The renunciation had been brief and final, not complicated by the suspense, the indecision, the hesitations that might have adorned it. The lover, evincing no disposition to languish for his *Dulcinea*, had married a less elusive damsel—one to whom print was a species of calico; and Elda had seen him prosper and bring to maturity three or four comely sons and daughters. Latterly she had even professed casual interest in his grandchildren. He was no longer an adequate symbol of a young girl's abnegation.

Yet this sacrifice, great though it had seemed to her at the time, had been but the first link in a chain of denials that eventually restricted Elda Greenleaf's life to the narrow confines of spinsterhood in her brother's home.

In her native town, where those of her name flourished more conspicuously than Martins or Sniders, there were persons besides her consolable lover who had witnessed the transformation of Elda Greenleaf; who remembered her as Banker Greenleaf's starry-eyed daughter; who recalled that she had written lyrics; who had heard brilliant prophecies of her coming literary eminence. Her girlhood poems in the *Weekly Gazette* were her substantial hostages to fortune.

Elda, in those old days, had trusted her poems even more profoundly than had her polite and credulous friends. She failed to understand what radiance they lacked to the editorial mind; why they had always come back to her like prodigals. Like any other disappointing children, they had been loyally received; but they had saddened

Elda's heart. If only she had doubted them! If only she had tried some other source of mundane joy! But she could not.

Her rejection of matrimony had not been unduly hard. She was following a gleam, and expected to shine in its light. Instead, her days grew only a little tarnished, and then only a little more tarnished.

At the beginning she spent happy hours, beguiled by pen and ink, in her upstairs study, overlooking her mother's pansies and verbenas in the rear of the rambling, unfashionable dwelling. She discussed her work with the friends who were frequent guests in the hospitable white house; and they responded, inquired, and encouraged her with pleasant flattery.

After a time friendly inquiry became painful. She evaded it, grew sensitive, kept to her room, and laid by her social life. Her quite erroneous vision of a microcosm scanning the magazines for her name rendered her solitary. She loved company, and stimulating talk, and a share of adulation; but she gave these up.

Had she but known that the moment she ceased talking about her poetry her acquaintances ceased to think of it! The chrysalis of a possible genius is not watched so attentively as the bud of a night-flowering cactus plant.

There remained, eventually, to gall her nothing but the determined sympathy, the consideration, of her family. Elda alone brought in the family mail from the box on the porch. Elda's occupations were invested with a touch of mystery.

"The child is busy," her mother would inform her father in matter-of-fact tones which tried to imply, and succeeded in denying, that Elda might be sweeping a room or baking a cake, or perhaps, ridiculous as

that might seem, studying a geography lesson.

When her father and mother were gone, and her brother had installed his wife at the foot of the table, she could often hear Candace explaining in apologetic loyalty:

"Elda asks to be excused. She is busy."

The children caught the watchword.

"Don't go in Aunt Elda's room! She's busy!" they would scream in admonition to smaller tots ascending the stairs to her retreat.

She was always supposed to be writing, and no doubt she often was. One writes, scratches out, and burns or preserves; but poems sadly minify the labors they absorb. By the time that Elda's namesake—a robust grandniece not very like herself, save in the identity of name and of bright, intelligent eyes—even by the time that El had outgrown school and college, the products of Elda's pen were easily contained in the small hat compartment of her trunk; and she had begun to be aware that Fame, the Pharisee, had passed by on the other side.

Valor had not yet died out of her—the valor required to tell her beads before an empty shrine, glimpsing space the while through inadvertent cracks; but her hopes had come to rest on posthumous recognition. The end of living desire was visibly near.

On the day when El came home from college—at a time when the trunk tray was yet far from overflowing—Elda was destined to receive more than a prick through armor that had never quite protected the sensitive surface of her ambition. Indeed, it was a veritable wound, and her doctor dealt it. She would propitiate time, and time receded.

She accepted her physician's verdict without visible shrinking. The old parlor where she sat was very quiet, and outside the parlor windows the June sun played among the leaves. What a quantity of June sun the garden had drunk in since first Elda had seen the golden shine of it there! Sun and sap and leaf and then perhaps a blossom tossed carelessly here or omitted there.

A bee struck hard against a window screen, buzzing. A passing motor car blurred Elda's question.

"Eh?" queried the doctor. "No chance? Why, yes, a chance. In the old days, maybe not, but in these days of mod-

ern surgery—why, certainly a chance. I'll send you to a surgeon in New York."

Elda sat near the doctor, with whom she had danced in a gayer past, considering his words, considering how they could possibly refer to her, feeling, in spite of an acknowledged weariness, in spite of aggravating symptoms which had induced her to seek medical advice, perdurable and unexhausted. Old? Ill? How *could* she be?

Opposite her a traitorous gilt-framed mirror hung on the wall—a mirror which had reflected the elation and the discomfiture of her ancestors; and in its depth she saw her seated figure, her graying hair, the wrinkles of her pallid face, the slender white hands against her dark dress—the hands of a lady who had not toiled. She was there in the mirror. She encountered herself—not her real self, but the self that others were aware of, the self which, cling as it might to the frail thread of life, would presently let go.

"Operations are expensive," she said to the doctor.

"Well, what of that?" he queried gruffly. "You're not a pauper."

"Almost." She steadfastly regarded her mirrored counterpart. "Almost," she repeated; "but you're thinking, I suppose, that the family name is still ornamental on a check. There's my brother—my nephew. No, it isn't likely I'll be denied the luxury of an operation."

"I'll arrange with your brother."

The doctor rose abruptly to go, annoyed by the not unfamiliar eccentricities of his patient. Elda continued speaking.

"But it's a luxury, doctor, which I might choose to forego. I'll let you hear from me before you consult the others."

She stood at the door, watching his departure down the flagged path, in her heart the pang of sky and sunshine, of the eager evanescence of winged life in the garden.

The telephone recalled her. It was one of El's sisters—who had gone with her parents and her grandfather, Elda's brother, to meet El at the station—explaining that the train was late. They would all lunch down town, the girl said. Mother hoped that Aunt Elda would find something she could eat in the refrigerator.

After Elda had hung up the receiver, she sat down in her own room, meditating. Could she afford an operation? It was well enough to talk of others paying for it, but she did not want them to. Even if her own

resources should prove sufficient, was an operation worth bankruptcy—an operation that might fail?

She could devise happier ways of spending her money, and she fell to thinking of them. Why shouldn't she take her chance, not with an operation to be dreaded and to be paid for, but rather with the recuperative powers of her own constitution, and with the known fallibility of medical opinion? Why not—oh, bubbling wine of the human spirit, oh, deathless hope coaxing delusion!—why not stake her slender all, a diminishing patrimony nearly expended, on a last trip to New York, where she might seek not medical but editorial verdicts?

Always she had kept herself in the background. Hadn't she been wrong in making cold postage stamps the emissary of her vital mission? Hadn't some one said that "personal presence moves the world"?

She opened her trunk, surveying her neat stacks, ribbon-tied, of manuscript. She couldn't, of course, take all. She must choose, discriminate; but the task would be a joy. The sacrifices of her whole denying, limited life were represented here. Why should she hesitate to put upon the altar her final gift of a few moments of time? She had only to go to the bank, to cash a check, to pack—

She was in a fever of energy. The inhibitions of a lifetime temporarily lost their controlling power. She would go to the bank.

II

THE familiar residence street on which she lived, with its rows of shade trees and neat frame dwelling houses, was glamorous, distant, a new creation, as she passed along it under the bright June sky. It was as if she were seeing it for the first time, or as if she were leaving it forever; but the dingy bank—her father's old bank, with its linoleum-covered floor and the advertising calendars on its walls—partook of reality, and of the confusion that attended her financial dealings.

The cashier helped her.

"Going to New York?" he asked.

His question was grave; but only as Elda returned to her home, clasping tight her well filled purse, did the gravity of his tone acquire a clear meaning. Of course—he was the doctor's son. He was thinking of the operation.

She herself thought of it. Her elation, her painfully gained mountain top, was clouded over.

The house, when she reached it, had become clamorous with youthful voices. El must be there with the other children. El, indeed, ran out to meet her, throwing vigorous young arms about her great-aunt, dislodging her bonnet.

"There, child!" Elda protested. "You're a whirlwind!"

But one couldn't help loving El. She was so robust, so spontaneous, so carelessly reliant on her physical exuberance, as if nothing else mattered.

In the parlor Elda's brother, gray, thin, kindly, sat stroking the cat. Wilma—his daughter-in-law, El's mother—stood near a window, reading to him from a magazine which she held. It was a poem that she read; but she paused when Elda entered with El hanging upon her arm, and came forward to meet her.

"Dear Aunt Elda," she said, "I'm so pleased! Congratulations!"

Elda was puzzled. Who had told Wilma her plan? Wherefore congratulations? What could Wilma mean?

El looked astonished, too.

"Oh, it's the magazine!" the girl exclaimed. "I gave it to mother to read. Grandmother, did *you* like the poem?"

"Very much, Elda." He answered El's question, but his eyes were upon his sister. "That you should command recognition at last, after these patient years, is fitting recompense. It puts you among those greater ones," he ended, smiling, "who choose a noble and therefore a distant goal; and I rejoice with you that it is gained."

"But, grandfather," cried El, "the poem's—"

She hesitated, considered, stopped.

Slow comprehension of the nature of this family error made Elda speak.

"You refer, brother," she said, "to something that Wilma has read to you from her magazine?"

"Certainly—a very beautiful little poem. It's one that you may well be proud of, and it loses nothing by Wilma's sympathetic reading. We share the pleasure of your success."

"But the poem—" began Elda.

El's voice broke in.

"Mother, let Aunt Elda have the magazine. She hasn't seen it. Come, auntie, we'll look at it together in your room."

Hurriedly, insistent and chattering, she led the elderly woman away.

"They have made some mistake," said Elda to her grandniece, when she had gained her room. With trembling fingers she removed her bonnet and laid it meticulously on her pillow. What if they hadn't made a mistake? What if some poem, sent out and forgotten, had returned to her thus unexpectedly in the radiant guise of print? She adjusted her glasses nervously. "Let me see it, child."

El handed her the magazine, and she read; but there was for her no glorious surprise.

"The name is mine," she said wistfully, when she had finished. "It is a very pretty poem, but not like my poems. I did not write it."

She looked again at the printed words—Elda Greenleaf. Just so her own name would have appeared on the printed page. Long years had she yearned to see it just so, but under an alien poem it mocked her.

"The name is mine, too, auntie," El remarked softly.

"What?" asked Elda, coming out of her saddened reverie.

"The name is mine," repeated El.

"And the poem?"

"Yes—that, too. I wrote it." The girl laughed a little constrainedly. "I do write them sometimes, you know—only you don't know, for I hadn't told you, of course."

"You didn't tell the others," Elda reproached her.

Bitterness entered her heart. All her struggling, wasted years gone vainly for what this mere child had accomplished with a facile stroke of her pen! A gift of the gods in this pleasant but quickly and carelessly turned vessel of the flesh! No sacrifice, no dedication, and yet the flame descended, and men saw it!

"No, I didn't tell the others," El admitted. "I thought mother would know it was mine. I never dreamed she would make such a mistake," the girl went on, in the egoism of her youth; "but now I don't see why she need know, Aunt Elda."

"To be sure she must know," Elda answered. She struggled for generosity. "It is a very pretty little poem—one to be proud of. It will please your mother to know that you have written it."

"I can write others. I can get others published." El's assurance was swift and

uncompromising. "Oh, Aunt Elda, why don't you keep this one? They think it's yours."

"It isn't," said Elda.

"But if I give it to you? It's mine to give away if I like. Why shouldn't I?"

"Child," said Elda with some severity, "it is you. Nothing can make it my thought or my word. No single letter of it is mine. Do you imagine that I am as Jacob, desiring the birthright of another?"

El pouted slightly that her magnanimity should be so condemned and rejected. "I don't take that little old poem very seriously," she retorted.

"You ought to." Elda placed her fingers, thin, cool, not quite steady, on the girl's plump, warm hand. "My dear, you ought to. Who are you, or I, or any one, to question this gift of the gods?"

Her eager hope and the pain of disappointment had alike died within her. Her unworldly, withdrawn, and yet very clear old eyes were fixed on herself, who had fought the fight without winning it, and on this young girl toying with the laurels of an unearned victory. Between these two, she, Elda Greenleaf, had to choose.

"My dear," she said, "it is not necessary for me to tell you that all my life I have aspired to the honor you have won. To me it has been denied. You must not hold it lightly; and you must not, like me, attempt to make a place in the field of literature while you yourself are hidden in this little village. I can't at this moment recall, child, who it was, but some one has said that 'personal presence moves the world.' I have made a mistake in judgment which you must avoid."

She drew her pocketbook from beneath her bonnet, where she had laid it, and opened it. She took from it her modest treasury of bank notes and spread them out upon the white counterpane of her bed. They lay there between her and El.

"These are yours, child," she said. "They are to help you in working out your career. You have made a beginning, and only you yourself can set the limit of your endeavors."

El returned her aunt's earnest gaze, her natural vivacity momentarily subdued.

"But, Aunt Elda," she said, "I don't want to go anywhere. I can't go anywhere. I'm engaged. I'd rather get married."

"You'd rather marry than write?"

"Yes—I can still write when I like to."

"Perhaps," answered Elda dully. She gathered up the bills and replaced them in her purse. "If you don't want them," she murmured.

She felt old, tired, exhausted.

III

THEY sat, the two, for a moment in silence. The sun, entering through leaves, flickered on the carpeted floor and was reflected from the metal trimmings of Elda's trunk.

The light caught Elda's eye. The trunk was a reminder. In the open tray of it were those close piles of folded paper—the devoted labors of half a century, the tears of her life, its laughter, its thoughts, and its petitions, the crown of her hopes and the grave in which they had been buried.

Her long race against time and extinction was almost over; and in the certainty that this was so she yearned to commit these precious fragments of her life to a new generation, to commit them even to the irresponsible hands of her grandniece. El had written a poem acceptable to capacious editors. Under her levity must be depths of true feeling if one could fathom them.

"Child," said Elda, "do you see my trunk—those papers in it?"

"Yes, auntie. Are they letters?"

"Those are my poems," Elda paused. "Some of them, no doubt, are faulty, and I should perhaps be sorry to see them in print. As for the others, I may be a biased judge; but we are of one family, my child. My name is your name, and whatever honor we may gain is our equal glory. My poems are the work of my life, the only legacy I have to leave. Your young eyes, El, can distinguish among them what is worthy to survive. I leave them as a trust to you, my dear, to publish as you see fit when I am gone. See, child, my trunk key has a blue ribbon on it. You will know it when you find it among my things. I keep it in my little jewel box, there on the corner of my dresser."

She held the key out to the girl, but El did not take it.

"I don't quite understand, Aunt Elda. Do you mean when you are dead?"

"Most certainly."

"I don't see what I could do. Do you mean for me to read them all, Aunt Elda, and send them to magazines?"

"I don't know," Elda paused. "It might be possible—" Her words came diffidently. The trunk key lay in her lap, and she steadily regarded the blue ribbon against her black dress. "Perhaps, El, a little book, if you think it best."

El's fine eyes opened wide upon her great-aunt.

"But, auntie, those editors you've sent the poems to—couldn't some of them advise you better than I? After all, you know, I'm not a critic. I'm not an editor. Probably I shouldn't know at all what to do with your things."

Elda sighed.

"I'm only asking you to do what you can. If it's too much—"

"Oh, no, of course not; but father would do it so much better—or mamma, or—or grandfather, perhaps."

"I am asking *you*," said Elda simply.

Her weariness, her disappointment, were written upon her countenance. Even El could read so plain a legend. Even her youthful self-concern was not proof against the pathos of the human spirit going down in defeat and clutching at some nearest straw.

"Of course, Aunt Elda, I'll do as you ask me to," she agreed; "but I can't promise how much good it will do. Perhaps you can find somebody else who will suit you better. I mayn't be able to do anything with your poems, you know."

"I shall leave this key to you," said Elda. In her earnestness her voice quavered. "I'm sure you'll find some of my verses that you'll like. I'm sure there'll be something!"

She put down the lid of the hat tray, closed the trunk, and locked it.

"Come, El," she said. "Let's show the others that it's your poem."

She picked up El's magazine, which had lain forgotten on the bed.

In the parlor she made her announcement to El's mother.

"Wilma," she said, holding out the magazine, "you have all of you made a mistake. This is my name, but it is my namesake's poem. El wrote it. Congratulate *her*!"

She found her brother, El's grandfather, in the garden where their mother had grown pansies.

"Brother," she said, "I talked to the doctor this morning. I am not so well. He thinks an operation will give me a chance.

I've been to the bank. There's money enough for that—and for the expenses afterward; and all the rest I leave to El."

She stooped to pick some of the yellow and purple flowers at her feet.

"Here's all the sun of the garden,

brother," she said; "all the sun that has been shining here since we were children. Will you wear it? Only some of the purple shadows must go with it. After all my long life, brother, I have nothing to leave with you but a symbol."

Hunger

TELLING HOW JOHN BRONSON, WAIF OF THE DESERT, LOOKED FORWARD TO SUNRISE AFTER YEARS OF DARKNESS

By Elizabeth Burgess Hughes

THE desert was illimitable. Its horizon was a gray line of sand parallel with a vitreous turquoise sky. The heavens above were like open furnace doors with vast flames behind them. Even the air was brassy to the taste.

Bronson swayed as he walked. His lips hung open, and he panted like a dog in the heat. He was almost spent. His throat throbbed with a raging thirst, and his mile-worn feet ached unbearably. Once a splotch of ironical shade under a mesquite bush caught his wandering attention, but he shrugged and kept on.

The lizards darting in and out of the sagebrush were the only living things, besides himself, to be seen. If only he could get past this blistered, God-forsaken stretch, he thought wearily, as he walked deeper into the palpitating gateway of hell!

His mind went around in a circle, parched and futile. Was he dying—dying on his feet, out here alone in this damnable bake oven?

But gradually the glaring heat of the sun began to lessen. The benediction of the dusk was coming on, and Bronson momentarily revived under it. He saw before him, a little farther on, a rocky defile with scrubby bushes marking it. He stumbled down into the hollow of it and lay there gratefully, too tired to open his eyes.

Presently he thought he heard a human voice, and stared out hopefully through a crevice in the rocks. Then he cried out, unable to believe the evidence of his own

senses. Just below him lay a recently pitched camp—so crassly new that it was like a coin direct from the mint. Oh, thank God, it wasn't a mirage or a dream! The thing was there—he was sure of it!

He must have been plodding through that inferno longer than he thought. He had reached the other side of the blistering desert that was sucking the soul out of his body. He lay with his head buried on his two arms, weeping tears of weakness and gratitude.

The little valley threw out its few stiff primary colors, flaring and sullen, walled about with hills and desert—not a beautiful spot, but to the footsore wanderer it was as a glimpse of the chalcidony and chrysopraxe foundations of the new Jerusalem. He was so near that he could see the tipsy lettering on a signboard—"The Purple Lily." It seemed to spread arms of welcome, that ugly little shack. Already men were crowding to its doors.

He watched them with a sense of detachment. There were men of many nationalities, desert brown or pale with the pallor of the mines; big and little; old and young; clear-eyed and furtive. It was a jumble of humanity that stood forth rawly, unglossed by any effort toward the effete civilization that makes a man pretend to be other than what he is.

Bronson, drooping raglike over the edge of his aerie, felt a tornado of emotion sweep him at these old sights and sounds. Eight years—eight years ago!

Why, then he was lithe, sunburned, gay, and fiery with the heat of youth. Now—well, he looked twenty years older than he was—a stooped, colorless, shaven-headed wreck of a man. The years of the locust had almost eaten him alive; but now they had passed. What was to follow?

The feeling of faintness seemed to leave him. He forgot his sun-baked body and blistered feet. For many years he had been alone. Now something within him seemed to go out to those men yonder—human beings, ready, perhaps, to be kind. His eagerness came up within him like a flame, and he got to his feet.

He went down, slowly, painfully, but gladly, into the camp. In the Purple Lily the faro rooms were filling rapidly. Bronson limped up to the bar and asked for a drink. With the burning feel of the fluid in his dry throat, an old lure laid its hot finger on him. Ambition came back. Life revived in him. He could feel the cards sliding in his fingers again. He wanted to play. Strange, how the gambler's fever got you, when you thought you had forgotten it!

Perhaps, after the years, this first game might be a recompense for his last one, eight years ago, when he had killed a man. Cheap liquor had made of him a snarling animal. Then the little life that he and Rose were expecting had been prematurely snuffed out by shock. A few weeks later Rose went away—left him for another man, somebody told him afterward. Bereft in one month of name, freedom, wife, and child, he wept behind the bars that caged him—a shaven-headed, branded thing.

But that was a long time ago. Gradually he had grown apathetic. To-day there wasn't much left of him. Most of him had died. Parole—the word meant little. Freedom itself meant little. He was lost, bewildered, uncertain, with only the instinct to live beating under his numb, stupid acceptance of life.

Deep in his heart he had missed the gay, friendly voices of the past—people who could laugh, and laugh again. He wanted to laugh again, too. Out of the shadows there sometimes seemed to rise, like a wraith, the sweetness of a strange and lovely perfume—the echo of a woman's whisper—the feel of soft, curling fingers in his.

He couldn't believe that he had really killed Lew Slatherby. He had no recollection of it, but then he had been too drunk

to know much, and they had told him he had done it; so finally he believed them. Nevertheless, every now and then would come a queer doubt, and he would say to himself:

"I never killed Lew Slatherby! I never killed Lew Slatherby!"

A man who had just come in slouched past Bronson to the bar, and accidentally struck his shoulder in passing. He turned to see who had barred his way. He saw a scowling, lonely face under grayish hair, with burning eyes beneath the untidy sweep of it—tortured eyes, compelling, seeking, as if aflame with some ever-living thought far back in his brain.

The newcomer stared at Bronson for the space of a minute, with the high-pitched laughter, the loud curses, and the tinny music of the faro rooms in the background. Horror spread over his big, bleak features. It seemed to ripple down to his finger ends, for he drew them up with the convulsive movement of a man in the noose of a rope.

"Who's the stranger over there by the door?" he asked the bartender, when finally he had torn his eyes from Bronson.

"Who? Oh, *that*? Never saw him before. Hobo, probably, or maybe jailbird. What's yours, Mr. Holt?"

Holt answered absently. As if magnetized, he had returned to his scrutiny of the stranger. Bronson's look, meanwhile, had roved past him, apparently forgetting the encounter.

Presently Bronson moved over to the card tables. He squatted on a stool, obviously intending to play. Holt continued to watch him furtively.

Bronson, for his part, was turning over in his mind the sharp recoil of the stranger and his involuntary gasp of astonishment. Something began to stir in his numb mind—to stir and grope about in a sea of fragmentary memories. He struggled to piece together vague bits of recollection that eluded him just as he seemed to grasp them.

Somewhere he had seen this man before; but where? The more he puzzled, the more indefinite became his impressions, until at last, with his mind a sea of befogged thought, he gave it up, and turned his attention wholly to the cards.

He seemed to have been leaning feverishly over the table for an eternity; but at last, when the swimming haze of smoke and the mingled smells of the cheap drinks

that slopped the bar had penetrated even the corners of the room, and the tenseness of increasing interest in the game reached snapping point, suddenly John Bronson relaxed, dropped back on his stool, and laughed aloud.

His head whirled, his feet felt like chunks of lead, and his hands shook, but—he had *won*! Why, it was incredible, melodramatic, a dream!

He swept his winnings toward him in one triumphant gesture. Thank God, if this were true, his hands hadn't lost their cunning! But then it might be only fool's luck.

Even as he muttered thanksgiving to an alien deity, there burst on him the sharp accusation that tenses the players in an instant and brings the breath of tragedy in its wake.

"You damned cheat!"

Bronson jerked upright. All the blood in his tired veins flamed up to white heat. His fatigue was forgotten.

"Damn you!" he snarled. "You lie!"

His accuser was a miner, pale with the sunlessness of his toil, nervous, irritable, ready at a touch to fly into ungovernable rage; but as Bronson looked at the man, his eyes slowly softened. That gaunt, be-reft, suspicious personality was as pitiful as a child's cry. Bronson had thought that prison life had made him hard, but now he knew that he had never before known real sympathy for his fellows. The brotherhood of pain knows its password and signal.

His uplifted hand dropped. The flare of hate went out of him, as memory flashed on the screen of his mind that last game and the stifled years it cost him. He would be no Cain for the second time!

But the miner, misunderstanding the gesture, shot a word at him:

"Yellow!" He scattered the cards, and his teeth showed like a beast's about to spring. "Lie, do I? Well, we'll see about that! There ain't the man living can call me a liar!"

His long, thin, gnarled fingers, impoverished and tigerish, closed about Bronson's throat like a vise. The convict struggled, but, weakened by his long term of confinement and by the past two days' tramping through the heat, he was no match for the gaunt miner. He was forced backward, and his slouch hat rolled to the floor, exposing his shaven head.

A shout of derision went up. His failure to fight had marked him a coward in their eyes, and immediately public favor swung to the miner. Some one began to chant, "Up the River, Up the River," but this was drowned by coarse laughter.

"Aw, let him go, Daggett—you don't want to kill a fellow on parole!" shouted somebody.

But Daggett's remorseless fingers closed tighter about his victim's throat. Bronson felt himself swaying into illimitable blackness. After all, what was the difference? Rose had left him. The years behind the bars had taken hope and youth from him. This was as good a way as any.

A big man, abruptly stalking through the crowd, jerked Bronson to his feet and floored the miner with one mighty sweep of his big arm.

"Aw, hell, why don't you play fair, Daggett? You're always pickin' a fuss. He wasn't cheatin', and you know it. You fly into a temper if anybody but you wins a game. This bird ain't able to fight. Can't you see he's starved out and weak? What if he has been up the river? I reckon there's others here that ought to be. Nice lot o' Pharisees, ain't ye?" he taunted. His hand went suggestively to his hip pocket. "Anybody wants to fight, come forward! Anyway, I'd as lief fight a baby as that poor critter there!"—with a sweep of his disengaged hand in Bronson's direction.

Bronson stood blinking, a little dazed, drawing breath like one who has been running hard. The sound of many waters was in his ears.

The miner struggled to his feet and leaped at Holt, who held him to one side as one might play with an angry child.

"You ain't goin' to hit him, Daggett. If you do, you'll have me to settle with, and you know I'm a pretty fair fighter myself!"

The miner panted, with his eyes on the white lines upon Bronson's throat where his fingers had been pressed.

"Parole!" he sneered. "Bet it ain't even that! You made your get-away, I guess! Bet they're after you now!"

Bronson stared foolishly, twisting his hands like a nervous woman.

"Yes—I'm out on parole," he said thickly. "They say I killed a man—in a poker game. I—I was innocent, God is my witness!" Again the shout of derisive laughter. They had all heard that phrase

before. "I never killed Lew Slatherby. I don't know who did it. I wasn't—myself, but I can't believe I did it!"

The big man who had come to his rescue—the man who had accidentally jostled him near the door, earlier in the evening—looked at him as if he wanted to brand the convict's features on his mind. Then he pushed Daggett into a chair. Strangely enough, the miner stayed there sullenly. Obviously the big man was a power in the camp.

"Now get back to your game, and cut out the fightin'," he advised shortly.

One or two players made a move as if to obey the order. The boss of the place, who had been sent for, came bustling up belligerently.

"Say, you darned hobo, what you mean raising hell in my place?" he began threateningly, to Bronson.

Holt barred his path.

"I ain't no notion of stirring up a fuss, Sam, but a human's a human. This fellow's hungry and sick. It ain't in decent humanity to kick him when he's already a down-and-outer."

Sam looked at him, hesitating.

"I ain't no call to baby this feller," he said.

"I reckon not, but you can feed him and let him alone. I was watchin' that game, and he played square. Daggett's a fool, and it was all his fault."

Sam looked at the big man. He knew Amos Holt's reputation. The fact that the big man bore a charmed life was universally accepted.

"Seems like the gosh-durned idjit just tries to git killed, and can't," one of his friends had said of him.

Holt's tones were quiet, but they carried conviction.

"Oh, all right!" agreed the boss. "We expect this sort of thing every now and then, of course; but, just the same, we ain't seeking hobo patronage. Tried the new drink, Holt, called Mad Sally? Hey, Mike, set out Mr. Holt a bottle of that new fizz!"

Holt smiled grimly, and turned to speak to Bronson.

Bronson had gone.

II

THROUGH the cool night the outcast plodded away from the crassly new camp, the hot, tainted air, and the raucous voices

of angry men. He crawled up the rocks stiffly, painfully. Once beyond them, he struck out blindly, not knowing or caring whither his steps might lead him.

In many men's lives there are psychological experiences which cannot be explained, but which stand forth with irritating and unforgettable vividness, in spite of their haunting mystery—or perhaps because of it. That which Bronson had seen in the gaunt miner's eyes—the thing that had stayed his anger and made the others believe him yellow—what was it? It was the same hungry questioning that he had seen a thousand times in Rose's pitiful dark eyes during that fateful year before the baby came.

Rose was an Easterner, who had known the kaleidoscopic streets, the bustle and multitudinous interests, of New York. The crude, vast silences of the Western plains wore on her. She had not been happy, yet she had never complained. Only the deep, insatiable hunger of her eyes had betrayed her, and Bronson hadn't fully understood that—until to-night. Strange how the look in that fellow's eyes made him think of Rose!

He knew, now, through what an abomination of desolation she must have gone. He had been careless, selfish, not at all the man to stand by a woman during months of loneliness and peril. Poor Rose!

So she had gone away, after they lost the baby; and he took to drink and became a rounder, unfit to love any woman or to be loved by any woman—or so he thought grimly as he retraced his life while stumbling on through the night. She had gone—there was the sting—with another man. He had never even seen the man, but some one told him about it later.

He wondered if he would always be remembering—if her face would always rise before him everywhere he went. No—Rose wouldn't wish him to remember. She had a soft heart. Even though he was a murderer, she wouldn't want him to suffer.

Then, whimperingly, he cried out the only bit of solace he had known for eight years:

"Rose, I never killed Lew Slatherby! I know I didn't do it!"

All the time his tired feet were carrying him farther from the lighted camp and the faro rooms. He had to flee. He couldn't stay there and let them taunt him with such words as "parole" and "jailbird."

Human contact hurt him, since the tragedy. He was better off alone.

The sand was still hot under the night wind. It seemed to call to him. He felt sleepy, so sleepy—

He dropped full length with a moan.

If only they had been kinder to him back there in the saloon! That big man—what was his name?—had been his friend, and he wanted to thank him and didn't know how. The others were like a pack of vultures gloating over a dead thing. He wanted to forget that he was on parole—that he had killed a man.

"No, no, I didn't do it!" he muttered dimly.

He dozed. It was a troubled half consciousness through which one figure kept swaying, now advancing, now vanishing—beautiful Rose of the strange hungry eyes. Suddenly the vision of her merged into a pale miner with talon fingers at Bronson's throat and face. Then there came before him the tall man with the burning eyes, who had rescued him from the taunting pack—a man who was his friend, perhaps.

If only God would give him another chance!

After a very long time he opened his drowsy eyes with the sudden feeling that life of some sort was near. He turned on his elbow and looked.

In the moonlight, scarcely a step away, a gaunt gray wolf sat on its haunches, eying him intently.

Bronson jumped up, every instinct alert for flight. His knees trembled from weakness, and queer cold shivers ran along his spine. He was at the mercy of the beast, for he had no weapon of any kind.

The wolf scarcely stirred. Its hungry, burning eyes were fixed on the outcast with an almost hypnotic stare. To all appearances it, too, was on the point of exhaustion. Its ribs stuck through the sides of its bloody, discolored coat.

The man limped forward, looking back to see if he was followed. The wolf was behind him, limping, too—slinking along furtively. What was the history of this four-footed outcast, Bronson wondered? Had it been driven, wounded and ill, from the pack, and left to wander about the waste places, dying of thirst and heat?

As he furtively glanced back, and met the animal eyes fastened on him, he was reminded of something. Would he never escape the eager hunger of eyes like that—

eyes full of hunger, everywhere? Man and beast—hunger! Rose! Rose!

He stumbled on, and the pain in his heart was so great he almost ceased to fear the mangy, close-creeping thing. Alone with a starved wolf!

Why, but there was a bond of sympathy between them, the discarded man and the discarded beast. Their pack had turned on them and driven them forth. What did anything matter now?

Suddenly every ounce of his strength was gone. Beneath him was the vast reach of the desert, overhead a high, white moon. What need to go on? Where was he going, anyway? He was so tired—so horribly tired! The only thing in the world that he wanted was sleep.

The wolf lay down beside him. The swift night wind rolled up the weary scroll of his thoughts. He slept.

III

A PISTOL shot scattered the silence. Bronson leaped to his feet, his heart pounding like a mad thing. He felt as if the bullet had gone through his own body.

He saw a blurred world of gray and mauve dawn. A group of men on horseback surrounded him. Between two of them, with handcuffs on his wrist, was Amos Holt, the big man who had rescued him from the talon fingers of the miner with the starved eyes—a man who would be his friend, he thought, if they had met under other circumstances.

Holt smiled at him grimly.

"Well, hombre," he remarked in an oddly softened voice to Bronson, who had again dropped weakly to his bed in the sand, "you've had a close call and no mistake! That damned beast there was just ready to suck your blood. If Daggett hadn't fired just when he did—well, you can guess!"

Bronson brushed a hand across his forehead, trying to clear away the mental mists. Daggett! Yes, it was he—the gaunt miner with eyes like Rose's; but the madness of hate had left him. His contemplation of Bronson was strangely apologetic, as if he wanted to make friends.

The gray wolf lay dead on the sands. Daggett's gun was still smoking.

"But he—he slept here all night beside me!" cried Bronson, pointing to the beast.

The men shook their heads politely. He couldn't know what he was talking about.

Why, that wolf was half starved. Evidently it had just come upon the sleeping man, and in another minute they would have been too late.

"I tell you he slept right here beside me!" reiterated Bronson, begging them to believe.

"He's wandering in his mind," murmured Daggett, and his words sounded sorry and regretful.

Amos Holt leaned down and laid a hand on Bronson's thin shoulder.

"You never knowed it," he said quietly, his rough face calm almost to beauty, "but I killed Lew Slatherby. We was all drinking, and he was a damned cheat. He made me mad, and I plugged him; but in the excitement suspicion lit on you and stayed there. I was in love with your wife—had been for a year, and she knew it. She let me take her away, because she thought you had stopped caring, but she never lived with me—not one minute. Get that straight, friend! I believe that if they locked you up for murder and left me a clear field, she would come around in time and love me; but she never did. She's living over there in Virginia City, waiting for you to come out of the pen. She keeps boarders and sews, and never gives a thought to any man but you. She keeps your picture on her dresser and says her prayers in front of it. Her hair's white, but she's prettier than she ever was. It's as if a light inside sort of makes her shine. She's a good woman, Bronson! I reckon

you thought all along she'd gone to the devil."

Bronson was too much dazed to reply.

"I've suffered a thousand years of hell while you was taking your eight," Holt continued. "I've walked the floor all night, thinking of your eyes, defrauded and hungry, and of Rose's, sort of pitiful the same way, when she looks at your picture. I kept thinking of her waitin', waitin'—and at last I broke. I wrote out my confession—the officer here has it—so you're a free man, see? I can't give you back your eight years, but I'm giving you the rest of your life. I've been a damned skunk—nobody knows it better'n me. You go back to your wife! Lord bless you, Bronson, you and Rose!"

The officer reached down a steadying hand and Bronson climbed to a saddle, where he clung dizzily. It had come to him, as abruptly as a motion picture visualizes a scene, where he had seen Holt before—at that last game, eight years ago! Once he had heard Rose speak of the man, but he had forgotten. Would he ever have remembered, but for this?

So he *hadn't* killed Lew Slatherby! Slatherby's blood would not confront him at the Judgment! And Rose—his Rose of all the world—was waiting!

As the little cavalcade set off toward the camp, Holt turned in the saddle and looked back at the huddle of gray on the desert sand, but John Bronson looked ahead to the sunrise.

THE HOBO

THE dahlia is a lady fine
In frills and furbelows;
She rarely bows her stately head
To any wind that blows.
The bright petunia gads about,
A simple, friendly thing;
The tomboy morning-glory loves
A fence to climb and cling.

But a hobo is the goldenrod—
He roams o'er vale and hill
When autumn days are shortening,
And autumn nights are chill;
A merry rogue who meets you in
The dusty wayside grass,
And never fails to nod to you
In greeting as you pass.

Minna Irving

The Star of Love

HOW DONAT LAMOUREUX FOUND IT A LONG, LONG WAY BACK
TO HIS HOME VILLAGE IN QUEBEC

By Leslie Gordon Barnard

HE saw it hanging above the afterglow as he went, and he hurried his steps, for he knew it must be late, and she would be waiting. Always, after the milking and the time of evening chores, he went down by the west pasture, to the lane that edged his farm and hers—his and hers after a manner of speaking, for the title deeds read "Arsène Saint-Onge" and "Camille Lamoureux," and these two were but Marie Louise Saint-Onge and Donat Lamoureux, and not yet of a majority. Still, when the good God withholds a full quiver from two families, giving them but an arrow each, and of the opposite sex, why, then one may well hope that the discreet noddings and prophecies of their elders may be fulfilled in the good God's own time.

"How late you are, Donat!"

"Cyprien Lestrangé was at the house, Marie Louise."

"I do not like Cyprien, Donat!"

"But you do like Jules—eh?"

"That is different again. He is a friend of the family; but Cyprien is not like his brother. He has grown into a rough sailor, full of oaths. He was at our house, too, and such wild stories he told! I wish he would return to the sea!"

"To-morrow, early, he leaves to join his ship at Quebec."

"Well, I am glad. You let his stories keep you from me, Donat!"

The boy moved restlessly, for the seattened face of Cyprien was before him, the great round oaths of Cyprien were in his ears, and the lure of far ports was upon him.

Marie Louise came close to him, a frightened hush upon her. Suddenly, in the tree above them, a bird twittered its belated song, and the scent of the sweetbrier hedge

caught at Donat, and the gleam of lights in his father's house, and the glamorous dusk, and the evening star growing brighter. Perhaps he was a little frightened, too, at the thing in his breast, for he caught her by the shoulders, drew her to him, and kissed her upon the forehead and then upon the lips—which he had never done before. The universe swam dizzily, and they were alone in it.

When she spoke at last, she whispered, pointing:

"Look, Donat—it is blessing our love!"

Then he lifted his eyes, too, to the evening star, while she told him:

"You know, my Donat, that is the bright star called Hesperus, the star of love. I have read of it in a book that the *curé* gave me."

"Marie Louise," he cried impulsively, "wherever I see it, I shall always think of you and of our love!"

"But—but you will never leave me, Donat? We will always look at it together when the darkness comes on? You will never leave me?"

He looked away for a moment.

"But of course not! Why should I leave you, Marie Louise?"

II

It was the morning star that he saw now, though he had little thought for it, for the heart of him was as cold as a dead thing, and his eyes feared to notice anything save the muscled haunches of the mare and her twitching, sensitive ears, growing distinct against the cold gray of dawn. He tried to forget the home of his fathers, which would be awakening to life without him, and the girl in the next farmhouse, who would still be dreaming with the starlight in her eyes.

After a long while, topping a rise, a band of sparkling blue appeared, which—comparatively near as it was—the boy had never seen.

"The St. Lawrence!" Cyprien told him, and added that a smudge of smoke which flawed the blue was a steamer.

Donat's heart leaped to life. Soon they were on the outskirts of Quebec, whose bustle and grandeur amazed the boy, though he felt it not unfamiliar, perhaps because here came his ancestors—hardy adventurers from St. Malo.

From the heights of the city they looked down upon the shipping, and Cyprien pointed out the Mary J. She looked small enough in the tangle of masts below, but Donat's heart swelled with a high ecstasy at the smoke rising from her rusty funnel, and the blue Peter at her masthead, though he knew not the meaning of the signal.

"What? You blubbing, youngster?" scoffed his companion.

Whereat Donat swore an indignant oath, to reassure Cyprien as to his manhood and self-control.

"We'll go aboard her now?" he asked.

"Not just yet," said Cyprien.

He led the way through the streets of Lower Town, so coming to a low shop where seafaring men greeted Cyprien roundly and the boy not at all, as if he did not matter.

They entered the doorway. The fumes that sprang at Donat were repugnant to the lad, until he remembered that he was of the sea, and tried to look as if all this were familiar to him. Given a mug of liquor, he drank his portion, gulping painfully, for he knew nothing but the mild native wine from his father's vineyard. He was set on fire and mightily heartened. He stamped his foot with the best of them when a burly sailor, pot in hand, sang in a tongue of which Donat had but slight knowledge:

"There's a roaring old nor'wester
Tearing o'er the main to-night,
But our good ship runs before it,
And its bluster drives her right;
It may shake her, it may break her,
But it helps to drive her through;
And we'll soon be home in port, boys,
Where they're paying off the crew;
And we'll soon be home in port, boys,
Where they're paying off the crew!

"In on the chorus, boys!" cried the singer.

On the second repetition Donat found himself joining in as best he could:

"And the money in our pockets will set us 'most insane,
Till we've spent it in a roaring, tearing time ashore again—
Till we've blown our every copper, and are off to sea again!"

Somebody set up the drinks. Donat drained his mug, spilling a dark flood upon his clothes. A serving maid twitted him. He grinned foolishly, snatching at her arm. She struck him smartly with the flat of her hand, bowling him over, amid roars of laughter.

Donat lay still on the foul boards of the floor, staring up vacantly at the beamed ceiling above him, with its draperies of dusty spider webs, and thinking himself already at sea.

III

THE ship was under him now. The deep baying of the whistle shook him. The trembling of the vessel, with the turning of the screw, was matched by the trembling of his own body. He wanted to cry "Bravo!" as she gathered speed, and the splash of the water grew in his ears. Instead, he dashed madly to the stern, intent upon viewing the churning wake, fell clumsily over a rope, and was rewarded with a smart box on the ear.

"Get up for'ard there, with the cap'n's cup o' tea!" a voice bellowed at him.

Cyprien, with his head half up the companionway aft, leading to the quarters of the crew, interpreted the order in a voice that said, as plainly as his attitude, that he had now washed his hands of his protégé. No doubt he had already collected the promised half sovereign for bringing aboard a docile cabin boy.

Donat, as yet, was not discouraged. The steady progress of the vessel toward the sea, the widening river, the songs at sunset when he gathered with the crew aft, the babel of tongues, the curious whining gibberish of three West African negroes—all these fascinated him. Up on deck, where the masthead light came out against a steel-blue sky, the evening star twinkled above the afterglow, but Donat was not there to see it.

On the third evening, watching the growing expanse of the waters and a far light-house moving its pencil of light in the dusk, his heart was suddenly constricted. From

the companionway, close by, came the sound of voices raised in harmony:

"Swiftly we go, down to the sea—

Push along, lass!

Push along, lass!

There's a woman at home a weeping for me—

Weep away, lass!

Weep away, lass!

For a ship is my love, and my home is the deep;

Though my lady at home on my shoulder should weep,

E'en the salt of her tears holds the taste of the sea,

And to kiss her dear eyes stirs the rover in me!

Weep away, lass!

Push along, lass,

Down to the sea!"

Scarcely at all did Donat understand the words, but a lump troubled his throat most horribly. Suddenly, in a tree above him, a bird twittered its belated song, and the scent of the sweetbrier hedge caught at him, and the gleam of lights in his father's house, and the glamorous dusk, and the evening star growing brighter. He desired only to rush to the captain and beg to be taken back, to be let off, while yet his native land was in sight!

But the ship maintained her steady, throbbing progress, and the waters around her were already very great. Donat knelt on deck, sobbing out his agony, and there was none to stop him or to mock at him, for the watch was forward, and here, aft, the chorus was busy with the refrain:

"Weep away, lass!

Push along, lass,

Down to the sea!"

The Mary J. was an ocean tramp. This Donat did not know, nor did any one particularly trouble to tell him. His own idea of the matter sufficed him. A ship was like a train. When it reached a certain point across the sea, it turned about and came back again.

Having once overcome his qualms of seasickness, which troubled him until Cape Race was well astern, he took new heart and set about the composition of a letter to Marie Louise. It was a laborious business, for letter writing did not come easily to Donat; but there was confession to be made, and high resolves to be set down in cold black and white. To it he brought all his moods, until the thing became a veritable human document, mirroring his hopes and fears.

When evening came, and he saw their star, he kept tryst with Marie Louise; and when the other stars came out in the dome

that shut in the immensity of the sea, he thought of her eyes, and was comforted, knowing that she would forgive. He grew impatient to be done with the voyage, and his face turned homeward.

When they told him that another morning would see them off the Eddystone, Donat went aft, sought a sheltered spot, and finished his letter, with the thought that he could mail his with the captain's letters—which would be put off at Plymouth, so they said. He licked his stubby pencil valiantly, spelled out the words, and was not unhappy.

Borne to him on the breeze that came from the Channel waters dead ahead was the song of the ship's carpenter. Chips claimed London as his home town, and he sang cheerily:

"She'll empty my pockets and raise up old Ned,
And hif I talk back, watch 'er barsh in me 'ead!
And 'er poor lovink 'usband will wish 'e were dead—

Yus, lying asleep in old Dyvy Jones's bed!

But I care not for that, for the land that's ahead

Is Hengland—is Hengland!

So then, Mr. Stoker, get busy and stoke,

And oblige a poor 'armless and 'omeloving bloke,

For the land that's ahead is Hengland!"

The chorus took up the chant readily, even the West Africans contributing a twanging, whining harmony:

"So then, Mr. Stoker, get busy and stoke,
And oblige a poor harmless and homeloving bloke,
For the land that's ahead is England!"

Now there was nothing in these half understood words to induce tears, unless it was that a curious overtone caught up the individual longings of these men of many races, and made it their song; but Donat, listening, dropped tears upon his finished letter, which to-morrow must be mailed at Plymouth.

He went forward to ask the cook for an envelope and the necessary English postage—for he was now the cook's assistant. He approached the galley. At sight of him, the cook gave a bellow:

"Hey, you Frenchy!"

Donat tardily remembered certain neglected pots that were his special charge. He retreated before the cook's threatening gestures, afraid not for his own person, but for his sacred letter to Marie Louise.

"So that's what you're about, hey? Foolin' around writin' love letters, and gettin' me bawled out for a dirty galley!" The cook grinned, and sniffed mockingly now,

for he was not a bad fellow. "Love letter, hey? Let me see it, Frenchy!"

He snatched for it. Donat pulled away jerkily, slipped, and fell. The gusty Channel wind swooped down triumphantly. The French lad gave a heartbroken cry. The pages of Marie Louise's letter were trailing, fluttering aft, to become the prey of whirling, quarreling gulls.

He took up his neglected duties, with a hardness in his features. He had no heart to touch pencil or paper again that night.

With the morning came countless duties. The mail was transferred, Plymouth dropped bluey behind, and the Channel met them choppy. All hands were required to set the Mary J. shipshape for her home port of London—even Donat, in intervals when he was not engaged in the galley. No moment, as well as no heart, remained to him for the writing of another letter to Marie Louise.

IV

DONAT was in London. He spent his shore leave and his pennies—perhaps with more wisdom than he knew—on the top of motor busses, gaping delightedly at all he beheld, and storing up amazing things to tell when he reached home; for he was surely going home.

"Well, kid," the cook had said, "looks like we're turning tail and going back to the old St. Lawrence. Heard the old man talking to Mr. Mate this morning. We're sure making a quick turn on the cargo!"

From which Donat, whose knowledge of the English language was expanding with remarkable rapidity, picked the meaning, and rejoiced.

To-day a new scheme went ashore with him. He would buy Marie Louise and his parents something grand from this tremendous city! When he stopped to ask "de bes' place in town for buy t'ings," some one jokingly recommended Bond Street.

He found himself, at last, in a street both narrow and crowded, but the shop windows seemed to contain, among other marvels, all the jewelry of the world. He would have been hesitant at going in to price things, but chose a shop where they were marked plainly in the window—ten, or twenty-five, or whatever it might be.

He decided on earrings for his mother, marked "seven," a scarf pin for his father, with a fat red eye in it, marked "five," and a rope of pearls for Marie Louise,

marked "thirty." Slow computation rewarded him with the conclusion that seven and five and thirty, taken from his store of forty-five shillings, would still leave him a margin.

He entered, and a gentleman came forward, dressed more splendidly than the mayor of Ste. Isabée, and accosted him. Donat gathered his courage.

"I buy sometings, me, for ma girl!"

He pointed out ropes of pearls in a case. He was shown an insignificant string, marked "two." Donat shook his head scornfully.

"You tink I can't pay? Look!" He drew out his purse to show the silver pieces. "Fort'-five I got. I give t'irty dat one in window!"

The gentleman smiled.

"But it would take six hundred of those!"

"Seex hunderd? Out dere you say t'irty!"

"Pounds," said the gentleman, explaining the difference.

Donat's eyes filled. So Marie Louise could not be a grand lady!

"See here," said the fine gentleman. "I think I can find you what you want. We happen to have a few."

Gleaming trays from far back in the shop were produced, and for forty shillings Donat found himself the trembling, delighted possessor of gifts quite as fine to look upon as those in the window.

His eyes were shining now. A quick fear came lest the cargo should be all aboard, and the vessel clear, before he could get back to her. He hurried.

No—there she was in dock, the loading still in progress, but almost completed. He went on board. The Thames was agleam in the sunset, and its waters faintly mirrored the evening star. Donat wanted to fall on his knees and thank the good God for life, and love, and the home to which he would soon return.

At the masthead flew the blue Peter.

"Hello, kid!" the cook accosted him. "Heard the news? That's all wrong about this cargo being for Quebec. There's a bunch of us tramps been chartered handsomely, I understand, for a rush job; but not Quebec! Quebec, huh! Valparaiso, my boy—Valparaiso!"

Utter fear was in Donat's eyes.

"Where's dat place?" he managed to ask.

"Valparaiso? As good as t' other end of the world, sonny! You'll not see your mammy for many a long day yet!"

V

DONAT was threading the ways leading from the wharf where the Mary J. was finishing her hasty loading. He knew nothing of the penalties of desertion from a ship. He knew as little of the papers he had signed, pledging him to go where the steamer went. They had been signed at Quebec, while the effects of his first strong liquor and the twin intoxication of promised adventure were upon him. He knew only that he must get ashore.

The forests of masts along the docksides heartened him. Surely some of these ships must be bound for the St. Lawrence!

He had acted with impetuous haste, and it was still not completely dark, so that before him, as he went, just above the grime of buildings and the smoky rim of the London atmosphere, he could see the evening star. It seemed a good omen, but a flutter agitated him at thought of the growing darkness, and of himself alone, and ill provided against night, in this great city. As if the omen held, he now saw before him a doorway in whose frowzily curtained panel a card showed. He spelled out the words:

ROOMS—DAY OR NIGHT ACCOMMODATION FOR SEAFARING MEN

He rang the bell, and the door was opened by a young girl.

"A room? Yes—come in!" Her voice turned from him to the darkness of a staircase. "Mother, a room for the night!"

"Aye—put him in Number Four!"

He found himself to be in sympathetic hands. The woman reminded him greatly of the stout, good-natured housekeepers of his own countryside. Shortly, over a meal, he was telling the girl of Marie Louise, and opening his treasures for inspection.

"Mother, here's a poor lad without ship to take him home! We must speak to Captain Pross."

"Aye—you shall run round to Cap'n Pross directly the dishes are done. The poor lad!"

Captain Pross proved to be a red-faced, agreeably jolly man, who assured the wayfarer that he knew of just the ship for him. Donat signed the necessary papers in the morning, with blurred eyes and trembling

hands, asking no questions, and eager only to be aboard.

He did not like the men on this vessel; but he kept to himself, and did his work valiantly, and the days slipped by as the ship drove through smiling seas, and he dreamed by day and by night of home and Marie Louise. Not for days was he quick enough to notice that the evening star was much to starboard, rather than ahead. When he did, he accosted the first shipmate he met.

"We come near de St. Laurent?" he asked.

"Oh, the St. Lawrence! Never saw it, lad, and don't expect to for many a day. We're one of a bunch of tramps chartered to rush a special cargo to South America."

Donat shook his head.

"Me, I don' onderstand! Cap'n Pross, he say 'St. Lawrence.' I go home. My home, she's on Canada."

"Canada! Hell, no! We're bound for Valparaiso!"

Donat stared across the waste of waters. Presently he brought forth his Bond Street purchases, and wept over them. At the sound of footsteps he hastily hid his treasures, but not his tears.

"Hullo, kid! What's up? Bawling? Come along for'ard and sing for us! We've heard you singing, Frenchy, so don't lie!"

"Me, I can't sing to-night," said Donat.

"Come along for'ard, I tell you! A sailor's got to learn to sing, and not to weep!"

VI

CYPRIEN LESTRANGE swore one of his mighty oaths when he encountered Donat on a street in Valparaiso, slapping his thigh and laughing immoderately.

"So you came here after all, Donat! The joke's on you, my friend! Better keep clear of the Mary J., or the old man will get wind, and there'll be the devil to pay! Come in here—quick!"

They were in the doorway of a low drinking shop. Donat, following Cyprien's glance, saw the mate of the Mary J. approaching, and willingly allowed himself to be drawn into the shelter of a secluded corner. Cyprien found a table, and they sat down.

Donat forgot his alarm in what he now beheld. Here were sailors of every nation—Britons, Scandinavians, Americans, Lascars, and countless others. Moving among them were scantily appareled girls, for

some of whom, at least, a common bond of language existed only in a careless blasphemy—the taking in vain of a name which Donat had heard most on the lips of the good *cure* of Ste. Isabée, and at sound of which, since childhood, he had been taught to bow reverently.

"Better you had stuck with us, Donat," Cyprien said. "To-morrow we sail for home."

"The St. Lawrence and Quebec?"

"The St. Lawrence and Quebec."

"I will come, Cyprien!"

"Keep calm, my Donat! You cannot very well do that; and why should you? You are not a sailor yet. Knock around the world a bit, and become a man, before you think of home!"

The red glow of sunset shone through the low windows.

"You will speak to the captain for me, Cyprien? I did not know the wrong I was doing, and what he does to me I do not care. I will come, I tell you!" The light on Cyprien's face did not mellow it. "You do not understand, perhaps!" cried Donat in agony.

He pulled from his pocket a small parcel and opened it. Upon the table between them glittered the necklace that was to make a grand lady of Marie Louise.

"You poor young fool!" said Cyprien, simulating sympathy. "On that point I have bad news for you. Marie Louise has quite forgotten you. It is the way of young girls. Here!"

He thumped the table. Liquor was set before them.

"Drink!" ordered Cyprien. "You need a stimulant."

Donat obeyed dumbly.

"I have a letter," said Cyprien. "She has taken up with my brother Jules, and they expect to be married shortly."

"That is not true!" charged Donat wildly, but in despair. The improbability of such a letter reaching Cyprien on his travels was beyond his simple reasoning.

"As true as God Almighty!" returned Cyprien. "There—put up your necklace, and let us be off. This is not a good place, especially for one who sails for home in the morning. Well, if you will not—*au revoir*! I will pay the score."

Cyprien exchanged coins, words, and a laugh with the girl who had waited on them, and went out into the growing dusk.

The girl slipped into the seat that Cyp-

rien had vacated. She was a brightly colored girl, with flashing eyes and a polyglot tongue that spoke of dealings with men of many nationalities. Her eyes were big and soft and luminous.

"Poor boy, he is sick for his home! Ah, such lovely things!"

She toyed with the Bond Street treasure. He would have snatched the thing away indignantly, but her eyes were so soft and tender. She patted his hand with her slender white one.

"Another drink?"

He shook his head. In one corner a member of a sailors' group sang raucously in English:

"What matter if we sign on for a voyage long or short,

So long as at the end we find the things we hadn't ought—

So long as we can then enjoy the things we hadn't ought?

What matter when a sailor has a lass in every port?"

Donat lifted his head, not at the cheap, stupid words, but at the gay, defiant abandon of it all. Well, what mattered it? What mattered anything now? What matter that this girl had lifted the necklace from its case, and clasped it about her neck, and was laughing at him, her eyes close to his. He found himself almost laughing back. There was no Marie Louise for him to give it to now.

"What matter when a sailor has a lass in every port?"

They were shouting it out, and the sound of it swirled about Donat like the drifting smoke. He grinned foolishly, snatching at the girl's arm. She did not strike him, like the serving maid at Quebec. She whispered something in her broken French. He stared at her unsteadily. He rose, and took her arm.

The chorus of revelers rasped out their song again. A sailor must learn to sing, and not to weep!

Leering eyes followed them as the girl guided Donat through the tables. These he saw, but not the grinning face of Cyprien watching from the low doorway. A certain ugly defiance was growing in him. Fate had thrust him in a corner with no way of escape. Very well—a sailor he would be!

Cyprien vanished from the doorway as Donat turned his face that way for a moment. Through the open door he could see

the evening star riding in a pale wash of lingering light.

VII

DONAT LAMOUREUX was of the sea now. After two years of knocking about the world he was homeward bound at last. He had learned to sing, as befitted a sailor, and not to weep. His English had been rounded out, so that he could sing, with not too pronounced accent, while the men stamped their feet in brave accompaniment:

"There's a roaring ol' nor'wester
Tearing o'er the main to-night,
But our good ship runs before it,
And its bluster drives her right;
It may shake her, it may break her,
But it helps to drive her through;
And we'll soon be home in port, boys,
Where they're paying off the crew;
And we'll soon be home in port, boys,
Where they're paying off the crew!"

"Chorus!" they cried.

Donat suddenly shook his head and stumped up on deck. The ship was indeed reeling in a half gale from the northwest as she staggered toward Cape Race.

The others sang the chorus without him, as later they sang it in the gulf, when Donat stood on deck and caught the first sight of the Gaspé end of his native province, lying mellow under the fading light of day. Mockingly the strains reached him:

"And the money in our pockets will set us 'most insane
Till we've spent it in a roaring, tearing time ashore again—
Till we've blown our every copper, and are off to sea again!"

But Donat, beholding his native land, wept, and forgot to sing as a sailor should; and the evening star came out over the land of his birth and of Marie Louise, and mocked him, too.

He was again in the home of his fathers.

"Papa has sold the cows, Donat. Without you he could not manage—"

"Hush, mamma! Is it not enough that our boy has come home?"

"The farm is doing not badly, Donat, though papa has worked himself almost to death without—"

"Hush, mamma! Let us thank God he is back safely. Presently I will take him around and show him what has been done. We knew you would return, Donat, to the land we all love. The farm is for you and your children, as we always said."

Donat did not speak.

"How should he raise us up grandchildren, papa, when he has let his chances go by? You know the things that are spoken. What girl would look at him now?"

"Hush, mamma!"

"Things?" Donat caught up the word. "What things?"

"Hush, mamma!"

"It is well he should know, Camille. To think that our boy should break faith with Marie Louise, and then—oh, God, I cannot speak of it!"

The woman buried her face in her apron, and began to rock to and fro.

"What does she mean?" Donat asked, almost sternly.

The woman swayed in her seat.

"What girl will have him now, to raise up grandchildren for us? Holy Mary forgive me, but who would have this son of mine, unless perhaps that wanton Zinie, who would be quick enough to accept jewels from strange men? Oh, what am I saying?"

"She means," said Camille Lamoureux, forced to it at last, "that she is thinking of the South American girl to whom you gave the necklace."

Donat started, and swore a sailor's oath.

"So it is true, Donat! We had only Cyprien's word!"

Donat turned abruptly, and took his passion with him from the house. He wandered in familiar ways, until he discovered that evening was descending on the fields. Returning by the west pasture, his feet lagged when he came to the lane that edged his farm and hers. The lane was empty, though the time of the evening star had come.

Then he hastily slipped behind a sheltering hedge; for Marie Louise came into the lane. She walked pensively to the gate by which they used to meet, looked up at the evening star, and he fancied that her lips moved.

"Marie Louise!"

Before the words were out he caught them, but another took up the call:

"Marie Louise! Marie Louise!"

Jules Lestrangé came down the lane, took her arm possessively, and the lane was empty again—save for Donat, and a bird who twittered above him, and the scent of the sweetbrier hedge, and memories, and the evening star growing momentarily brighter.

But there were other memories — of a ship, and sailors, and a song they sang:

"For a ship is my love, and my home is the deep;
Though my lady at home on my shoulder should weep,
E'en the salt of her tears holds the taste of the sea,
And to kiss her dear eyes stirs the rover in me!"

Now it was not Donat, the boy, who, standing there on deck with the waters growing wide before him, desired only to be set ashore, but Donat, the sailor, who must learn to sing again, with the salt of sea spray and not of tears upon his lips, while the chorus softly follows him:

"Weep away, lass!
Push along, lass,
Down to the sea!"

Returning to the farmhouse, he packed his things, from which he had taken gifts, and one especially.

"You will give it to her, please," he told his mother. "You may tell her it is from the bazaars of the Orient, and brings the good wishes of an old friend."

"As if she would accept it—and a necklace, at that, from a boy who—"

"Hush, mamma!" interrupted Camille Lamoureux. "I think I understand. And after she has married, and gone to Jules in the next county, where he has bought a farm, our son will return to us."

Donat's face was set. His father helped him with his luggage. Donat climbed into the rig beside the boy who was to drive, and they drove away in the gloaming.

"Drive slowly," directed Donat. "I must have a sense of the land to last me long at sea!"

In his nostrils was the sweet breath of the meadows, in his ears the twittering of belated bird songs.

"Why are you turning out, lad?"

"The road is narrow, and there is some one driving furiously behind us. We must let them pass."

The rig grew on the white ribbon of dusty road, came alongside, hauled up.

"Donat!" cried Marie Louise breathlessly, still pulling hard on the reins. "Donat, I—just heard! How could you leave without a word to me?"

VIII

THE white roadway was dotted by two leisurely rigs. Ahead, by direction, the boy proceeded slowly with the luggage. Behind, Donat drove with Marie Louise.

"Donat, as to Jules—it is my parents who forced him upon me. Every night I have prayed, and kept our tryst in the lane, feeling that some day you would come, and that our love would still hold true. Tell me it is so with you, Donat!"

"But, Marie Louise, there is Cyprien's tale—the shame of it!"

"I did not believe that, and I do not now," she said.

She looked into his eyes. Donat bowed his head.

"Nothing mattered to me that night, Marie Louise," he confessed. "I thought you had forgotten me because I left you, and would marry Jules—and in my heart were evil stirrings!" He hesitated. Then he said in a low voice: "This is the truth, Marie Louise. She put a necklace—your necklace—about her neck, and I—I laughed!" Marie Louise paled. "She hinted things—not for your ears, Marie Louise. They spoke to the evil in me, and I rose to go with her!" Donat's head was hung deep in his shame. "Now you will know that I am unworthy, and will let me go to the sea again!"

"My poor Donat!" she said faintly. "And you—and you—"

Marie Louise's cheeks were crimson. Donat shrugged his shoulders.

"No, Marie Louise! But what matters that? For the time I had intended—and it is what is in one's heart that counts. No—I ran out into the street, and she cursed me as I went!"

Slowly Marie Louise's color became normal again.

"But, Donat, that was victory for you!"

He looked at her, then at the evening star, shining bright over the plodding horse.

"That I do not know," he said slowly. "It was not of my doing." He shook his head soberly. "It was as I rose—to go with her, Marie Louise—that I saw it hanging low over the harbor."

"Hesperus!" she cried. "Our star of love!"

He nodded.

"Blessing our love, and keeping it pure, my Donat!" cried Marie Louise, forgetting the reins altogether.

The horse stopped willingly, and began cropping the grass by the shadowy roadside. The boy with the luggage continued conscientiously on his way, carrying out of sight the seafaring clothes that Donat Lamoureux would need no more.

No Punch

AFTER ALL, THERE WAS A WEAK POINT IN THE DARING RESOLVE OF HORTON NORTH'S WIFE AND HER LOVER

By Elizabeth Irons Folsom

IT had not seemed so compelling until that Sunday morning, as they stood together in her window, where the sun flooded over them. All of an instant the enormity of the condition gripped her. She knew that it gripped Clint too, for he drew away from her. He, too, understood that matters were going rather far between them.

"You see this won't do, Clinton dear," she managed to say, her voice not quite steady.

"It has got to do. It's too late to change."

She put one hand against his breast, retreating from his caress.

"We are not the kind to cheat and lie. We have—backgrounds to consider."

"We can't consider anything but the way we feel about each other!" he returned.

"No, Clinton!" Again she retreated, but her fingers clung to his. "There must be a decent way, if we think the whole thing out carefully."

"Think about Hort? Are you worrying about him?"

She shook her head.

"He wouldn't care a great deal. He hasn't much sentiment, you know."

"Do you think he has seen?"

"Of course not. I'd know—you'd know—if he had."

"Why hasn't he seen?" asked Clinton. "As it looks to me this morning, it must be mighty plain!"

She shook her head again.

"Not to him. He's not observing."

"Hort's pretty generous, Emmy."

"Yes."

"If he knew, and if he were asked, would he set you free, do you think?"

"How could he?"

"There are ways."

He took her shoulders and drew her close.

"We must have each other! How are we to do it?"

She touched his cheek lightly with one finger, trying to laugh, because deep emotions were too close.

"If Hort were told—about us," Clinton went on, "I don't know—well, it can't go on like this. It's at the end!"

An outer door slammed. She turned swiftly.

"There he is now!"

There was tragedy in her voice. Clinton drew her to him and kissed her lips.

"You run away to your room, Emmy. Give me the chance, and I'll tell him just how it is between us."

"Oh, hadn't I better do it?"

"No—it's my job. Run away and give me the chance."

II

BEHIND her closed door, Emmy North sat on the edge of her bed. She heard her husband fumble for the door knob in the dark hall—that was what she had disliked about the apartment. Her mind, absurdly, flashed visions of other apartments that she and Hort had looked at, where the hall was light; but he had said that a hall was just to walk through, anyhow, and it did not matter.

How absurd to recall such things when beyond that turning knob Clinton Calder was ready to tell him that the world must be pulled down and set up according to their ideas! She thought of how a falling world might look—noticed how fearfully lint accumulated under the beds—noticed her lost nail file under there, too. Yes, voices—clearly heard—that was Hort's—she covered her ears.

With her ears covered, the pulling-down process in the other room could go on, and she could think how necessary it was, and how the newly set up one would look.

Marrying Hort had not been a thrilling experience. He was older than Emmy, and, as she had mentioned to Clinton, not sentimental. He had been a good comrade, and they had had rather fine times, for Hort was of the outdoors. They had done creditable golf, they had tramped, and she was not afraid in a canoe when he handled it. His was a comfortable world, sort of—well, habitable.

Then Clinton Calder came, and everything turned over. He was quite a personage. His family was so blue-blooded that it hurt—Hort had said that. Traditions towered around it—money, high-held chins, grandfathers, funny-looking crests on the old carriages, and horses that curved their front legs high in air and made motors look base and of the rabble.

The family had impressed Emmy, and so had the work that Clinton was doing. A writer inspired her with awe, and she made much of his stories and verses.

"Pretty good stuff," Hort had said. "He's young. I wouldn't be surprised if he did something worth while."

"Yes—oh, yes!" she had answered.

She uncovered her ears. There was still the low sound of voices in the next room. Hort was talking, and his murmur was caught up by the lighter voice. She covered her ears again.

Her first intimacy with Clinton Calder had come about through some verses about ancestry. All in a moment, family and fantasy had gone down before her love, which met and clasped his love for her.

As she thought of it, love thrills ran through her, slow and fast, lingering and speeding. It was no longer reasonable to be tied to another man. If Hort would set her free, she would marry Clinton, and then life would be complete.

Hort would do it. She did not know exactly how—and yet she did, too. It was too bad, but it didn't matter for a man to be mixed up in ugly things. What was deadly in a woman was rather smart in a man, she had heard. Hort would manage it. He was fond of her, and he had often said that he wanted her to be happy.

Strange to sit there and, if she uncovered her ears, to hear the voices of two men talking out her love tangle! It would soon

be satisfactorily settled. Hort would take care of it for her, for he was middle-aged, and he understood.

The door into the front room opened.

"Emmy!"

Well, she would be brave, too. She would show these men that she could match their poise. She rose at once, walked into the bright room with confidence, and blinked there in the streaming sunlight.

Hort was turning around from lighting a cigar, and looked as usual. Clinton Calder met her halfway across the room and caught her hands in his.

"How brave are you, darling!" Oblivious of Hort—oh, yes, quite! "Emmy, love—he won't do it!"

"Who won't—what?"

"Hort. He says he won't take the method that would set you free. He won't make it easy for you!"

Hort was settling the edges of the window shades to a punctilious evenness. He turned.

"I'm sorry, Emmy, but—no, thanks. You see I won't have much left but my reputation after you two are together. Home gone—wife gone. No, I prefer, if you don't mind, to keep my name clean. I'm not sentimental. I'm not a hero. I'm a business man. It must be done some other way."

In their silence he began to gather together his golf clubs. The sticks seemed to get in one another's way. Hort fumbled them as if his grasp was uncertain or his sight not good.

"No. I'm sorry, Emmy," he repeated with great courtesy, "but I must retain my reputation."

"Then we'll take another way!" she said hotly.

"Of course, if you want to wreck yourself. You know what it will do. I'll leave you to talk it over. You'll excuse me, as it is my only full day for golf."

Clinton Calder put the morning paper in his pocket, looked to see if his commutation ticket was there, sought for two handkerchiefs, found them, and picked up his golf bag.

"Good-by," he said. "Sorry!"

III

WHEN he had gone, two long, steady stares crossed each other.

"I wouldn't have believed it of him!" said Emmy North.

Her softness had vanished, and her voice was hard.

"Nor I. And still, you can't blame him."

"Can't blame him?"

"From his point of view. I dare say it would hurt him in a business way."

Below the windows, where Emmy's gaze was fixed, motors were sliding, threading, weaving. The golden Sunday morning sun was like a flood. She looked into it—at the twisting maze beneath—her throat stiff, her eyes hot, cold uncertainty in her heart.

Clinton reached out for her and drew her tight. He cleared his throat.

"So it's up to us, Emmy! How much will you do?"

"I'll do anything you say. He's cruel and selfish. I'll do what you say."

"Then, as he won't give us evidence, we'll give it to him."

"Yes, we will!"

Silence again.

"I don't know how, Clinton."

"I know where I can take you, if you will go."

"I'll go, of course." Her voice was tense. "Where is it?"

"Across town. We can go there. I'll register 'and wife,' and then bring him a memorandum of the place and time. He can take it to his lawyer. I hate to talk about this, Emmy!"

"You can't help talking about it. He forced us to it. Can we go to-day, Clint—now?"

"Yes."

"Very well—I'll get my hat. We might as well have it over!"

Her head was high, her cheeks flamed, and she wound her brightest scarf about her neck. She and Clinton went out together silently.

"We'll attract less attention if we go in a street car," he told her.

"All right," she said; but she wondered what difference attracting attention made, as it was all done for publicity, anyhow.

It was an open car. The streets whizzed past. Emmy sat with her fingers wound together in her lap, a new excitement within her. So far, the excitement was not an unpleasant feeling, although the neighborhood through which they were passing was strange and almost squalid. Clinton, apparently, had nothing to say to her. His elbow touched hers as the car swung around corners, but he was silent.

Finally he whispered in her ear:

"Emmy!" She started violently. "I'll get off at the next corner. You go on three or four blocks, then get off and walk back to M Street. That will give me time to—register. I'll wait at the door for you."

"To register? Your own name, Clint?"

"I—er—yes. We must show it quite plainly."

The car lurched to a stop.

"Come back to this street and go in under the sign there where it says 'Walton'—see it? I'll be at the door."

He knew an awful lot, didn't he? She wondered how he knew so much!

She did not get off at the third corner, or the fourth; but at the fifth she rang the bell and stepped over to the strange, dirty sidewalk.

She walked back slowly. This was a fearful thing! No, not fearful, for it was just Clint, and he understood. They both understood. They were not the ordinary participants in a common sexual intrigue—not that at all. They were simply making right what was already right in reality. Too bad it had to be done that way!

As she saw the dingy glass sign that said "Walton," Emmy was conscious only of anger against Hort, who had made her do this thing.

The doors under the glass sign swung both ways. She pushed them, and found herself in a narrow hall, from which carpeted stairs led up. Clinton had a key, with which he unlocked a door at the head of the stairs. He gently pushed her in, and locked the door.

The place smelled like—what did it smell like?—old fried potatoes, unaired dirt. The carpet had once had big red roses, but they were tramped out. The only reason it was not dusty was that it was damp. Everything sagged noisomely—the gray bed, the armchair, the washstand, the dust-clogged curtains drawn stealthily together.

The last occupant had left a glass and a plate on the table. There were crumbs on the plate, and a huge cockroach, teetering on the edge, fixed beady eyes on Emmy—whisked suddenly—vanished. She shrieked under her muffling hands, and pointed shudderingly.

"I hate them so! Because they go so fast! If they would not be so quick!"

Clinton laughed, and it relieved the tension. If he could laugh under such condi-

tions, so then could she. With her gaze on the plate, she restored her calm by main strength and laughed too. Why not laugh? She knew positively that she and Clinton were different from any other persons on whom this fearful room had looked. They could do this deliberately, and their love was unsoiled, their dignity held whole.

She sat down on a straight chair by the door.

"How long do you think we must stay?"

He did not answer.

"It won't appear on the register, will it, how long we stay?"

"No—I should think not."

"I read a story once," she said, hooking her heels on the chair rung, "about a man and a woman who were revolted in a place like this, by reading some lines of Shelley—a good story, too. Perhaps you'll get the idea for a story out of this, Clint! I shan't mind being material for you."

"You are taking this so wonderfully, Emmy!"

"I must. I have no choice; and we'll forget it instantly, unless you find a story in it. I think perhaps you will."

A battered alarm clock on the bureau ticked full of purpose. She was proud of her composure—it was more than his. She talked, and tried to make him talk of his work. She spoke in the writing patter that she had learned from him.

"How much longer must we stay? There's that thing again on the plate! Can't we go, Clint?"

"Yes, yes! This is awful. I had no business to bring you. I'll go down first, Emmy. You come in a few minutes."

He held out his arms to her, but she shook her head.

"I can't kiss you here, Clint—not in this horrid place! We are decent. We only want our freedom."

"I could be decent and even kiss you once," he said, and laughed.

"No! Go on!"

After a little while she went alone down the thickly carpeted stairs to the tight doors that swung both ways—craven, hinting doors—pressed against them and stepped out into the street.

Sunlight—clear and warm—clean!

"Lord!" she said aloud. "Where does the wind blow hardest, to get that place blown off me?"

As she waited on the corner, he joined her.

"I love you, Clinton dear!"

"I love you, Emmy!"

IV

THEY were held up by a traffic crush, and it was dusk when they reached her home. Hort was sitting in his big chair, with the window open beside him. Outside, rose streaks lay on the river, and yellow ones, and a soft, thin purple streamed away to the south.

"Oh! You came in from the club early!" she said—to say something.

Clinton was very erect. He took a scrap of paper from his pocket and handed it to the other man, thus recognizing his presence. The entry on the paper was this:

Hotel Walton, Sunday, May 14, 2 P.M.—Room 189, Clinton Calder and wife.

Hort looked it over.

"All right!" he said.

He folded it and put it in his pocket.

"You will start this to-morrow, I hope," said Clinton, slightly nervous. "Let it get under way at once, will you?"

"Oh, certainly, at once," answered Hort. "Get it over—it's rather bad."

Emmy unclasped her fingers.

"Hort, I'd like you to know that there was really nothing in that place there but what was—but that was—"

"You don't have to tell me that, Emmy," he said gently; "but you understand, of course, that no one else will believe it. You know what it will do to you."

"Love is the only thing," she replied softly.

"That's all right, then, so long as you know what it means—headlines in the papers, and so on. If you really think it is worth it—"

"It's worth it to me!" she interrupted fiercely.

"It's up to you, then, my dear."

There was dead silence. Hort stood at the window and looked out. The blare of street noises came in across him.

He turned back.

"Then it's settled, I suppose," he said. "How about your folks, Clint? How'll they take it?"

It was as if Clinton Calder had been struck a heavy blow. His shoulders seemed to crumple beneath it. He stepped backward, staggering. His mouth was not tight shut. His fingers groped and clutched a chair back.

"My God! I didn't think of them! It will kill my mother! Father 'll never hold up his head! My God, Emmy, I can't do it!"

Hort put down the window and settled the curtains into careful folds.

"My God, Emmy, I didn't think—not what it would do to the family—to them and me—in that way!"

The curtains were not just right. Hort continued to arrange them.

"Emmy! I didn't know! I didn't think! Why—they—we never 'll get over it! Emmy!"

"You said," she began at last, "that I was all that counted."

Her husband touched her arm.

"Don't coax him!" he said sharply.

The younger man did not blubber, exactly, but he stammered, shivered, backed away, muttered apologies.

"I'll see you again. Don't let anything be done, Emmy! I can't do it! I wouldn't have had this happen to you for a million

dollars—but the family—I didn't think! If Hort had done it, I was prepared for that." He glared resentfully at Hort's impassive figure. "Just excuse me—I—I—"

He sought bewilderedly about, seized the door, slipped out, and shut it hastily behind him.

Emmy North's face was like wax, but her head was up. She put her hat on a chair.

"Well, perhaps he'll get a story out of it," she said defiantly.

"He won't, Emmy. It takes punch for a story, and this has no punch. It is all over in one day, and we are just where we started—the old husband and the old home. Nothing to it—no punch at all!"

She looked at him soberly.

"No punch? Is that how it seems to you?"

"Yes, and it will seem so to you presently. Just an incident—nothing to fret about. Come and see the moon on the river there, Emmy. Nice, isn't it?"

WISHING

I wish I had a little house
Beside the ocean's swell,
Where I could see the water swirl
And sniff its salty smell.
I wish it had three gables high,
With hooded, mossy eaves
To drip rain in the summertime,
And catch the autumn leaves.

I wish I had an orchard, too,
With pinky apple blooms
To listen with a trembling fear
When the surf runs in and booms.
I wish that when the winter winds
With storms would snort and romp,
They'd freeze my lashes to my nose
In most ungainly pomp!

And most of all I wish, I own,
For your old tweedy coat,
Your reeking pipe, your muddy tracks,
Your whistle from the boat;
Because, you see, without you there
I'd wish I were away;
And so, to make my wishes true,
You'd really have to stay!

Sonia Ruthèle Novák

Blue Steel

THE STORY OF A MEMORABLE NIGHT IN THE LIFE OF LOSEE MOTT, WHO HAD ALWAYS BEEN A COWARD

By Turbesé Lummis Fiske

CHARLES MOTT lifted his ax with pride, and ran his eye along it.

"Pretty creamy edge I got on the old blade. Take a look at that!" He held the ax out toward her with the careless sureness of the strong, and did not note the tremor of the hand that touched the blue steel. "Gad, it's great stuff—fine steel! Look at the temper of it, and the grain. Man who did that knew what he was about. Well, I'm off now. 'By, Losee!"

He kissed her with a sudden softness of manner, pressed her cheek hard against his, laughed chucklingly, and was off across the clearing toward the woods.

Warmed as she had been by the mute message of the caress, Losee Mott shivered as if the lip of a razor had gone across her flesh. The feel of that steel had gone into her like an icy serum; but it was a colder thought that was chilling the steady throbbing of her heart.

What would happen when Charles found out the truth—the truth that had been ground into her ever since she was a little girl, and had first known the pang of disappointing one who was adored? He was so strong, so scornful of anything that was spineless or weak—even, or perhaps particularly, in a woman, whom the Spartan virtues best became. And she adored him so! She always had adored him, since that first time she saw him striding down the road past her father's place, a woodsman's ax over his shoulder, his head thrown back with an air of splendid fearlessness and resolution.

Afraid of nothing himself, he was unable to understand people who felt fear, and any manifestation of cowardice roused him beyond all tolerance. His indictment of any one who ran away from danger, or who failed at a crucial moment, was merciless.

"By gad," he said bluntly, "if I had any one like that, I'd kick 'em out! There's no place in the world for weak sisters—better off dead!"

"Oh, Chas, don't say that!"

"Don't I mean it? No use for people without any nerve. All my folks are fighters—got guts, every one of 'em." He laughed and took her hand. "Shucks, what you looking like that for, Losee? What's all that got to do with you?"

"Oh, I want to be everything that you would like me to be, Chas—and suppose I'm not!"

"Funny kid! What stuff! Don't I know you, Losee? Think I'd have cared for you if I hadn't known you were grit clear through?"

She caught a quick, sharp breath that he did not hear.

II

HER father had been a strong man, like Charles, unconcernedly acceptant of her childish love and worship; and she had been a disappointment to him, as any one without the stuff of courage must be to such a man. Knowing herself so wanting, she had tried not to care for Charles; but now that it was done, she hoped to love him so much that in a little measure it would make up. That, she thought, would be old Quatly's counsel.

Old Quatly had tried to help her. A queer, crabbed old trapper, he had been the only one in her childhood who had been gentle with the tense, awkward youngster who felt herself so lacking in the qualities that should be the first attributes of a woodsman's child.

"Waal, every man's skeered o' something, child," he used to say; "but I dunno's I figger that makes a plumb coward

out o' him. Mebbe there's something he'll make up on—who's to tell?"

But old Quatly had gone, and there was no one even to try to comprehend.

And now there was Abe Herschall. In Heaven's name, why had he to come into her life again? Was it as a forerunner of evil?

Already, in the three months since Abe and his three brothers had taken up the strip of land east of Charles Mott's on Fallen River, Charles had twice had words with him. The outcome had been incomprehensible to Losee. Abe Herschall was of no cool temper, no tolerant trend; he was an expert at throwing the knife, and he had already killed two men in a quarrel; and yet he had let Charles order him off the land, with scarce a word in retort. What did it mean?

While she was pondering this phenomenon, she saw Charles coming out of the redwoods with his quick, swinging stride. With a premonitory sinking of the heart she noted that he was frowning. As she clung to him, luxuriating in the strong, full feeling of him close to her, she touched the wrinkle with a finger.

"What's the matter, honey?"

"Matter? Nothing."

He began to roll up his sleeves, standing wide-legged before the basin.

"But you look as if something had happened," she persisted.

He looked at her with nodding emphasis.

"Something's going to happen, if I catch that damned Abe Herschall on my land again!" He soused his head in the bowl, speaking through the suds and the splashing water. "Like to know what the rat's doing, nosing round my northeast strip! Hadn't been there for weeks till this afternoon, and all of a sudden I ran into him, poking around the trees."

"Chas, you—you didn't quarrel?"

"Quarrel? I told him to get to hell out of there!"

"But, Chas, didn't that make him mad?"

"Mad? Sure—made me mad finding him there. I don't like him and his gang. Farming—huh! They're no more farming than I am."

"You oughtn't to get him sore at you, Chas. They're a tough lot. Likely he—he'd do something."

"Do something—pshaw! All he did this afternoon was turn tail and get off.

Besides, I like a scrap. Keeps me from getting soft."

He emerged from the towel, under which his face had commenced to shine, and grinned at her; but Losee did not respond.

"What's the matter, Losee? Look like you were seein' your own funeral."

"Come on and have your supper, Chas. It's ready."

He took her in his arms for a softened second.

"Losee, it's wonderful to have you here with me! What makes you so cold?"

"Sit down, Chas, honey. Want your soup to be lukewarm?"

So there he came again, that Abe Herschall, casting an ugly shadow across all the quiet sweetness of her intimacy with Charles; and Abe knew the truth about Losee.

The memory of that scene brought the red shame into her cheeks even now. A small girl, trembling over an arm on which the marks of four teeth were darkening; a slinking, liver-colored cur; a ragged youngster with high cheek bones that seemed to squeeze his eyes, proffering a tobacco-stained knife; Abe Herschall's appraising gaze; her father in the rear, shouting.

"Cut it so the blood 'll run!"

She seemed still to feel the shrinking of her heart as her father brusquely repeated the order, a glint of light striking the edge of the blade and thrilling her breast with the shudder of keen steel, so that she started back and her father's face darkened.

"Give me your hand, my girl! What? Have ye no e'en the spirit o' a louse? And before outsiders! Give me that knife!"

Even to the day he died Losee had never won her father's commendation. She had accepted that; but Charles—God send her the power to keep his love!

III

BURLY and bearded, the tip of a sheath knife showing beneath his mackinaw, a man was coming across the clearing, making in the direction of the river. Losee recognized him, despite the changes seven years had made. If Charles should see him! She called out with a quick sharpness:

"Abe Herschall! Abe Herschall!"

He traced his steps with insolent slowness toward her.

"It's you, is it, Losee White? Heard you was up here."

"Where you going, Abe Herschall? You're trespassing on our land."

She felt the old fear of him as he answered her, not with words, at first, but with a dark glance. Then he came closer to deliver his sentiments.

"What the hell's it to you? Now that you've spoke, get this clear—Abe Herschall goes where he's a mind to, and there ain't nobody finds it profitable to interfere. One other thing—if you want to keep him healthy, see that that man o' yours stays away from the northeast strip. You hear?"

"You keep away yourself, Abe Herschall," she quavered. "There'll be trouble if I tell him you've been here."

He gave a contemptuous grin.

"You ain't goin' to tell him."

"I'd like to know why not!"

"Don't I know you, Losee White? Because you're afraid!"

With ostensible lack of significance, the knife slid out of its sheath and lay balanced on his hand, glittering chill in the light. She turned to goose flesh all over. Abe laughed, and gave her the sight of his back.

It came on a July day when even the forest felt the heat, with that murky quiet that hangs over the redwoods and stills even the flickering of the leaves. Losee had gone with Charles to the banks of Fallen River, where he was transporting his logs, to be floated down as soon as he had accumulated a sufficient quantity for the mill at Redwood.

Since Abe had come into the neighborhood, Losee did not like to be left alone. The woods lay heavy on her spirit, at best. There were disquieting rumors about—whispers of silent men on horseback at night, going no one knew whither. Just now, moreover, there was a more particular reason for her wanting the comfort of Charles's strength.

He slipped the chains of the load and unhitched the horse. The dappled mare pricked restless ears and quivered along her flanks with a little shudder that stirred Losee and made her look around. A chill ran electrically up her spine. Far beyond the north rim of the road, a pale whorl of smoke above the heavy serenity of the trees. Fire!

She felt the swift horror of roaring flame and searing timber that fire meant in the forest—miles on miles of undergrowth that would be tinder to the leaping flame—de-

mon of fire shooting forth its tongues—the cornered animals trapped in its midst.

Charles saw it, too; but his first thought was action. They would ride over and start a backfire, save the timber that lay between there and the river, protect the logger's treasure. He called out to Losee; but, paralyzed for the moment, she could not move, and all her terror shone out.

She came to herself under her husband's scrutiny, and it was the scrutiny she had been dreading to see—a critical, clear look without the light of tenderness, such as her father had often given her. A lumberman's wife to think of self when there was need of daring! He gathered up the lines.

"Oh, don't! I'll go, Chas!"

"You'll stay where you can be—safe. If the fire gets by me, take the skiff and row down the river."

She tried to retrieve herself. She had not meant to show that she was afraid. The thing had just sprung out of its own force.

"But, Chas—I'll go with you!"

There was no answer, except the answer of his silence. He turned the mare and she saw him galloping away.

Losee's eyes were blank with pain. The fire had been quickly over, but that look in Charles's eyes had not. He had brought her back to the cabin without a word, and then he had gone out alone. It was almost time for him to be back for supper.

Presently she heard his footsteps at the door. What was he going to say? He came in, uttered a brief "Hello," and sat down. What lay behind that heavy coldness of his brow?

Supper was ready. He moved to the table and sat eating in silence. Words that Losee might have spoken dried in her throat. He despised her!

When he had finished, he rose and went into a corner with a book, leaving her for the first time quite alone. He did not look up or turn while she washed the dishes. The silence was cruelly deep. Methodically he turned the pages. Eventually he laid the book down and went to bed, turning his face to the wall. That mute finish bit the most.

"Charles!" Her voice frightened her. She had not meant to break out like that, but now that it was done she must go on. "Oh, don't do like that, Charles! Speak to me!"

"What's to be said?"

"Oh, Chas, let's not pass the night without getting it straightened out! I know how you feel. I—I know you're ashamed of me. I know I acted like a coward. I *am* a coward, I guess, Chas; but if you'd help me and—love me—dad never did—I could learn, I think, Chas. Oh, Chas, don't just lie there quiet! Say something! Say you don't hate me!"

"What would I hate you for? You're just one way, I'm another—that's all."

He pulled the covers up around him.

One morning, a week later, he took his suit case down from the shelf.

"Chas," she stammered, "you going away?"

"Got some things to do in Eureka," he answered tersely. "Want to see if I can make a better deal with some of the mills there."

"That isn't why you're going, Charles! You're going—to get away—from me!"

He made no reply to this.

"But, Chas, you can't go like this!"

"Don't worry," he said dryly. "You won't be left here alone. I'll take you with me as far as Redwood, and get you a room there. I'll leave you plenty of money."

Money! She looked mistily at the rows of clothing he was taking down from the shelf which, curtained, formed their homely wardrobe.

"Charles, I can't bear for you to go! Please—I know you're thinking I won't make a good mother for your baby—but, Chas, you're so strong and brave, you don't know what it's like to be afraid. I'm trying—*don't* go away and leave me!"

After a while she gave a little hopeless gesture, and took down her own bag.

IV

To stay in Redwood was to justify the scorn in which her husband held her, and that was more than she could bear. As soon as he was gone on by stage to Eureka, she made her way back to the forest. If one day he should turn up and find her there—

But Charles did not return. Whether it was business, or whether his disappointment made the constant reminder of her presence too unpleasant, she did not know; but she was left with the giant silence of the trees, which seemed to keep watch on her by day and to girdle her with a name-

less terror of darkness by night. The ugly rumors of hidden doings grew, and she came to feel as if there were skulking men to be seen through the underbrush, if she but looked over a frightened shoulder.

Weekly she took the skiff to Redwood for supplies, and each week she would find an envelope from Charles. She would tear it open with a choking heart, and let fall her arms. It would contain nothing but a check.

Abe Herschall was more insolent than ever. She saw him often, as he calmly made use of the clearing as a trail to the river, and obviously he knew that she was there alone. She wanted to be strong, to drive him off, as Charles would have done, but Abe was not to be taken in by any show of bravado.

"You want to know where I'm goin'?" he sneered. "Guess that's nobody's business, now't your man's skipped out!"

"He hasn't skipped out!" Losee stoutly asserted. "My husband 'll be back any day!"

Abe's contemptuous smile greeted her words, and his gaze was like a flash light laying bare her humiliation. A little fury of futility came over her.

"You got to get off our land! You got to—you hear?" she sobbed.

"I'll get off when I'm damned good and ready, see?"

The fifth week there was no word from Charles—not even the check. Was that the end of it?

That was the week the stage was robbed. Losee heard of it in town. Booty had been taken, and men were beating up the woods in search of the highwaymen. The news destroyed what little sense of security the cabin gave her. All around she seemed to hear cracklings and rustlings in the underbrush, as of men on a stealthy trail; and if a leaf fell, she started up with her breath gone dead at her lips.

In this mood she sat, one afternoon, with a tiny bootee in her hand, thinking of the first beautiful months with Charles, and now and again coming nervously alive to the restless stillness of things around her. Suddenly, from somewhere far northeast of the clearing, there came, like the muffled clapping of some vast paw, the sound of a single shot. Losee started up from her chair. From the door she heard another shot, and then there was silence.

Somehow there came to her mind the thought of blood, of a man hunt, of some one gasping his life out under the somber trees. She stared through the dusk, fear chilling her nerves. There was a mysterious whispering among the redwoods. She closed the door and barred it, shaking from head to foot.

If there would only be some human sound, something other than this silence!

Rapidly, in quick succession, came more shots, a fusillade of shots—and then again that eloquent hush, like a pall.

Night fell swiftly, leaving the partially curtained windows shining like observant eyes. Losee pulled the curtains as tight as she could, but there were places where the glass glared through.

An hour passed in this waiting—complete darkness—a world of specters peering through the pane—the crackling of the stove the only life sound in all these miles of forest. Thoughts of terror lurked in every shadowed corner of Losee's brain, awaiting the moment to spring forth, as she went about her tasks.

Her cheap watch said that it was twenty minutes past seven. She tried to keep her eyes on the little dress she was sewing, but something kept calling them, pulling them to the east window. When at last she looked up, they encountered a face, whose instant disappearance was followed by a shaking at the door and a hoarse whisper of "Let me in!" that came in Charles's voice.

The Charles to whom she unbarred was hatless, his face was scratched, his clothes were torn, and on his side a dark spot of wetness was dripping red. He clapped the door to and stilled her cry.

"Hush!" he ordered in a tense whisper. "Blow out that light!" In the darkness he listened at the door, passing over the question of her presence there to one more urgent: "Anybody know you're here—Herschalls?"

"Yes," she whispered, with the unhappy sense that it would be unwelcome news.

"Damn!"

"Charlie, you're hurt!"

"Yes—shot. Keep quiet!"

"But, Charlie, let me—"

"Hush!" He listened again. "Why in hell didn't I leave some ammunition here?" He clapped his hand on an empty gun. "Can't get any farther to-night—that's sure. I'm about all in. Get me

some water, Losee. I'll wash this damned place!"

He took the water and the cloth out of her hands, as if he did not even wish her to touch him.

"But, Charlie, what is it? What has happened?"

"Those cursed Herschalls—I've known for a long time they were up to something. Then this stage robbery. My last check to you was in that pouch. Said nothing to anybody, but I remembered how Abe Herschall was always nosing around my north-east strip—the farthest and loneliest spot around here. It just got on my mind I'd find out why; so I slipped up here. The scoundrels have a little shack hidden away there in my woods. I didn't have time to search it—two of 'em caught me there. One drew his gun and fired, but I got him. Other one ducked out and got the rest, and the three of 'em are out after me."

In his whispered words the scene reconstructed itself for her—shots spitting from behind the trees—Charlie's ammunition gone—the flight in and out of monster redwoods—the temporary respite offered by a hollow trunk—Abe Herschall's bloody rage, his oath to find and kill the shooter of his brother and the discoverer of their secret. And he was following swiftly now on Charlie's tracks!

She cried out to see Charles go to the door.

"Where are you going?" she cried.

His answer brought the quick shame to her brow, for it made it plain that he was thinking of her weakness:

"What chance I got here?"

"Charlie, you don't think I'd tell 'em where you were?"

There was never any answer to this, for the next instant he had collapsed on the floor.

Even through her fumbling at his heart, the memory of that question was burning her.

"If I had any one like that," he had once said.

She lifted her head to listen, hearing a dog's excited barking, followed by his yelp, as if some one had kicked him into silence. Abe Herschall's dog, no doubt!

"Chas, Chas!" But he lay without an answering quiver. "What 'll I do? There's no place to hide you here!"

The cabin had one bare room—not even a loft, a cellar, a closet, or a cupboard—

only the bed, the table, the stove, and shelves.

The dog barked again, perceptibly nearer. Losee's eyes searched the curtained shelf under which her clothes hung; but the curtains lacked six inches of touching the floor. Even if Charles could stand, his legs would show beneath them. What refuge was there? *The shelf itself!* It was two feet wide, piled with clothing, and strong; but how to get him there? If he would come back to consciousness for only a minute! She could never lift him up.

The table stood on one side of the room, below the rough wardrobe. With desperate strength she dragged him to it. With a chair to help, she got him upon it; but from there to the shelf it was three cruel feet. And Abe Herschall—how much time before he came?

She fled to the window and stared out. A distant light showed now and again through the trees. It was the pursuers' lantern, whose telltale gleam they no longer tried to hide, knowing that Charles had no ammunition. It might be ten or even fifteen minutes before they would have followed the fugitive's trail, unless they were making straight for the cabin.

To get Charles to the shelf! A flat board that Losee used for ironing stood in a corner. If she climbed upon the shelf, could she drag Charles up that plank? She propped him against it, and hauled herself up to the shelf. Things swam before her, and she felt that she was falling; but she caught his arms and pulled.

Any one of a dozen things might happen to make her efforts useless. When she had him nearly there, the board slid out from under with a clatter; but she had him more than halfway on the shelf. She sickened at the thought of all the harm this pulling and straining might be doing to his wound. She felt his blood hot under the bandages.

One last wrench, and he was on top!

But what if he should move, or speak? She tied his hands down by his side with a cord, lest they should fly loose and disclose his presence. She covered him with garments. In the not too revealing light of the lamp the whole pile would pass as clothing—unless Charles moved or spoke.

Clambering down, she replaced the board and the table. Leaning against the latter, almost exhausted, she felt something wet upon her dress—blood. There were

heavy splotches of it upon her, and to wash them off, in the moments that remained, was impossible. And in the light of the lamp, as she lit it, she saw drops and splashes of it on the floor.

The work she had done was useless. The hunters had only to see those ruddy blots!

The sense of her powerlessness assailed her cruelly. The bloodstains—there was no denying them—not to Abe Herschall, who knew her so well, and whom she could not fool!

The lantern was coming across the clearing, straight in her direction. She looked around in cornered agony. Those eloquent blotches on the floor!

The lamplight threw a steely ray from Charles's ax, which stood in the corner. It made her think of the knife that Abe Herschall wore—the knife that had emptied the channel of two men's lives; and how many more victims would it claim?

Steel, cold steel! She remembered the hideous chillness of it as it slid out of its sheath, and she put up her hands to her face with a sickened terror.

V

FANTASTIC shadows capered at the cabin door—shadows of three gaunt figures with their hands on guns, and one on a knife that had crept out from its scabbard.

"We got you, Mott—come out!"

There was no answer. Herschall called again.

"Who is it?" replied a woman's faltering tones.

"It's her!"

"Kick the door!"

"She'll open!"

Thus variously the Herschalls spoke, and one pounded on the boards.

"Open 'er—no use tryin' to hold back!"

The door swung free, to show Losee Mott, pale as dawn, a robe caught about her, one arm hidden. Looking past her into the room, they saw no one. Abe Herschall shouldered his way in, the others followed, staring unbelievably.

"Where's your husband?" Abe demanded sharply.

"My husband?" They saw the welling tears come in her eyes. "Don't you know I've not seen him for five weeks?"

"Don't lie to me! He was up in the woods this afternoon, and shot Jay, damn him! But we'll get him—he's hurt, so there's no use you lyin'!"

"Hurt? Charlie hurt? Was that that shooting this afternoon?"

Two of the men were stamping on the floor, feeling for a trapdoor, kicking the bed, the wardrobe. She was face to face with Abe Herschall, and his stare was utterly merciless.

"You can see for yourself," she faltered, feeling her throat closing in. "He isn't here. Why, I was just writing a letter to him!"

Abe caught up the paper on the table. The ink was not yet dry. The faltering lines ran:

DEAR CHARLIE:

I haven't heard from you in more than two weeks. Oh, I miss you so much! Won't you forgive me and come back? It's only five months now, the baby 'll be here—how can I go through that alone? I had a bad accident to-night, and—

Abe put it down brusquely.

"And y' ain't seen him to-day? You dunno where he is?"

She shook her head slowly. At that moment her eye caught the faintest movement of the clothes upon the shelf. The dog, hovering outside, set up a barking and rushed in.

"Put that dog out, Abe Herschall!" It barked furiously. "You know how afraid I am of dogs! Put him out! Would even you torture a—a woman in my condition?"

A fleeting vacillation, and Herschall booted the cur through the door. Losee leaned, shaking, against the table. The man's hand came down on her shoulder, and he bored into her eyes, tightening his grip cruelly.

"You dunno where your man is?"

"I don't know!"

Reluctantly he let her go, and at that moment a shrill "Hi!" from one of the other brothers made her nerves leap in terror. Bob Herschall was peering down at something on the sill.

"Like hell she don't! Here's his blood on the floor!"

Abe caught her arm and jerked her up under his bearded face with a brutality that almost snapped the bone.

"You—lyin' to me like that! Now where is he?"

Ashen to the lips, she stared back into his eyes, with the feeling that her life's blood was draining away through a sieve of failing flesh. In her mind's eye, all the time, she could see that tiny motion of the clothing on the shelf.

"Don't I tell you I don't know?" she cried.

His finger pointed grimly to the telltale stain.

"Yes, I know it's blood," she flung back at him; "but what if it is? *It's mine!*"

The arm that had been under the robe came slowly out, wrapped in bloodstained bandages.

"No tryin' to fool me!" he snarled. "Le's see what's underneath!"

He unknotted the bandage, rolled loose the strips, and, as he came to the last layer and peeled it, laid bare a slash of oozing red half the reach of her forearm.

"For God's sake, leave me now! How much more do you think I can stand?"

Abe hesitated, took a sullen step toward the door, and halted with an oath. The pile of clothing was moving on the shelf.

"Damned cowards!"

Charles's white face broke forth, and he flung the clothing to the floor, rolling to the edge of the shelf. Losee screamed to see the leap of Abe Herschall's knife, but some one else was quicker than he. A voice was speaking out of the darkness behind them.

"Drop that, Herschall! Put up your hands, all three of you! That's it! Excuse us, ma'am, but we been trailing 'em all evening. Gang of damned holdups, all of 'em! Quick, Pete—give the lady a hand! She's falling!"

But it was no stranger's hand that caught up Losee.

"Oh, my girl!" said Charles, keeping her tight, so that she opened her eyes into his. "All the rest of my life I'm goin' to be makin' up to you for what I did!"

"Oh, Charlie, you've come back—that's all I care!"

Rage made the veins dark on Herschall's face.

"You damned little fox! So it was his blood after all!"

Herschall's staring eye and Charles's ran from her bleeding cut along the direction of her elucidating finger to something that lay upon a chair—Charles's ax, keen as the blade of a knife.

"You did it yourself!" Abe rumbled redly. "Fer Gawd's sake!" he swore, and let himself be hustled toward the door.

But Losee Mott had one more word for him:

"For my man's sake," she corrected. "I did it for Charles!"

Compensation

WHAT SIDNEY MERRICK LOST IN ENGLAND, AND WHAT HE FOUND IN THE WILDERNESS OF BASS RIVER

By Alan Sullivan

YOU will not remember the Gilesby case. It was a matter of interest in England some thirty years ago, lasted for a few days, and then became submerged among other things more arresting and piquant; but it was a poignant affair to two people who sat in a London restaurant on the evening when the decision was given, and the Gilesby title and the Oxfordshire estate passed out of their hands into those of others.

Sidney Merrick, who the week before had been better known as Lord Gilesby, was looking across the table at his young and extremely pretty French wife, and wondering whether he could say what moved in his mind without hurting her too deeply. He was also conscious that he had ordered a much better dinner than was, under the circumstances, at all justified; but one got into the way of ordering a certain kind of dinner.

"You see, darling," he began, plunging at it in a truly British fashion, "we really haven't much more money than is in our pockets this minute. I mean that I can clean up a thousand pounds or so, but that's about all."

She was small and very dainty, and, when puzzled, she had a habit of pursing her Cupid lips and opening her dark eyes very wide. She did this now, and the grace and charm of it nearly demoralized him.

"But a thousand pounds, *mon cher*—that is nothing! How does one live thus?"

"One doesn't—in England. That's just the difficulty. Would you rather wait till after dinner?"

She shook her head with a sort of child-like gravity.

"I think I would rather talk between the bits of the dinner. I am not any longer Lady Gilesby—is it not so?"

"No—you are only the prettiest girl in London."

She made a little *moue*, and tasted her soup.

"When this happens to others, what is it that one generally does—in your England?" she asked.

"That's exactly it. This is not our England any longer. People generally"—he hesitated—"well, they generally go somewhere to a place where a thousand pounds means something."

"Is it to leave England, *chéri*?"

"I'm afraid so. You see, we can't keep step with our lot any more. We'd be out of the procession."

She looked at him gravely for a moment, and then clasped her tiny hands.

"But how simple! I know!"

"Splendid! I don't. Let's have it!"

"We go to Tours, and stay with my family for some weeks. Then you will arrange with the good Vavasour, at Vouvray, that he gives you the London agency—that is what you call it, eh?—for his wine. Then we return here, and become very rich. One cannot buy good Vouvray in London, and it is the best wine of Touraine."

It was quite impossible, but he loved her all the more. The trouble with Vouvray was that it would not stand shipment well. Vavasour knew that, too, and had admitted it one day when the three of them were sitting in his *caves* over a dust-coated bottle of prisoned sunshine. Besides, to go to Tours would only be to cast himself on his wife's relations.

"I'm afraid that won't work. I couldn't sell a bottle of anything in a year. You see, dear, I've always drunk the wine myself. We should be living in two rooms, and you breaking your heart in pretending to be happy." He gulped uncertainly, and

then looked straight into her lovely face. "We'll have to go further than that, *mon âme*."

"But where, Sidney?"

"I was thinking of Canada," he blurted.

Her eyes opened even wider.

"But, *mon cher*, is this possible? The cold, the wolves, the ice—*mon Dieu*, does one not freeze to death there?"

"No," he said doggedly, "one doesn't. I'm thirty now, and I have never made or done a thing for myself. It's all been handed to me. Well, it's taken away to-day, and I'm ready to face a man's work. Think, Julie—I've never done a stroke of work in my life! I've always lived on what other people had done in the past. Now it's up to me. Supposing I did get an agency of sorts, I'd only be squeezing another penny out of some one else's product; and I want to own something."

"What can one own for a thousand pounds?"

"Land," he answered—"land in Canada. I can get the land for the work on it. Then it is mine—or ours. My end of it's all right. It's you I'm thinking about."

"You feel I shall be lonely?"

He nodded, trying to picture her in a log cabin—Julie, with her beauty and daintiness and the charm that was ever hers.

He saw her as she sat at the piano, only last week, with the soft light and her white shoulders and dark hair. He saw her in some corner of the wilderness, divested of the things she had been used to all her life. He pictured the contrast, and it stung him bitterly.

"Yes, darling, there will be a lot of loneliness about it, to begin with; but we would be very careful where we went, and others would come along soon."

"But Thérèse—would she be content, with no one?"

That nearly broke his heart, showing how little she realized the situation.

"You won't be able to have a maid now, dearest. I know you can cook. You used to make the most wonderful things in a casserole when we were engaged, and I ate them all."

"No maid? But what does one do without a maid?"

"Heaps, darling, heaps. You'll be busy all day long, and as happy as a clam. You'll come out and watch me felling trees, and we'll go fishing, and—oh, no end of things!"

She had apparently forgotten all about the dinner in contemplation of so strange an existence. Then, looking at him suddenly, she caught the strain in his face behind the smile, and perceived that it was really herself that he was thinking about, wondering if it was fair to expose her to this in order that he might work out his own salvation. At that a great wave of remorse overwhelmed her.

"*Chéri*," she said swiftly, a lovely light in her eyes, "you are so right, and I am so wrong! But you have always spoiled me, so it is partly your fault. Am I then a pig, a selfish pig to my husband, that I talk thus? Of course I do not want Thérèse. She would be very lonely, having no big husband, like me. When do we go, *mon cher*?"

He grinned at her with a huge and relieved devotion.

"When could you go?"

She shrugged her slender shoulders.

"*Quand monsieur le désire, je serai prête*. There will be some foolish things to sell in the way of clothes, and some more sensible ones to buy, is it not?"

"Yes, much more sensible." He raised his glass. "Darling, you're a perfect trump! I'll work the skin off my hands for you. Here's to the future!"

She looked at him across the brim of her own glass, complete love and trust in her eyes.

"*À l'avenir*!" she whispered. "With you, *chéri*, I shall want nothing. Oh, I am so sure of that!"

II

THUS do so many of the sons of England journey forth over the seven seas, because in their own land there is neither place nor room for them. She sends them out, this ancient mother, to jungle, prairie, kopje, and bush, bidding them be of strong heart, and doubting not at all that their love for her and their silent pride in themselves will be sufficient for the day, and that by and by she will welcome them home again, stronger men, wiser men, worthy offspring of their sires.

Sidney Merrick was of that breed. Once the shores of England grew dim, he heard, as many another had heard, voices that reached from far away, challenging, promising, welcoming, and alluring. The man in him responded eagerly, and his courage rose high.

They had decided on Canada—some place not on the treeless prairie, but on the water, if at all possible, not too utterly far from civilization in case of emergency, and in a location the settlement of which would not be too long delayed. With this in his mind, Merrick put his finger on the shores of Lake Huron in the great map in the railway office in Montreal, and asked if arable land was to be had there.

He found that he could get a hundred and sixty acres, with all its timber, practically for the work required in making the spot habitable. It was possible, the agent hinted, with a shrewd glance at Julie's delicate face, that a railway would come that way before long.

"But, *mon cher*, a railway at our door—how dreadful! I thought we were to live in the country!"

It made Merrick feel rather helpless. He was glad when the agent, who understood the situation perfectly, assured her that the coming of the railway would mean a great deal to the value of their farm. Then the man indicated what he thought a suitable place.

"That's Bass River coming into Lake Huron. There's high ground to the north—which is a good thing. The soil is all right, the timber's not too heavy, and I would try it in a minute myself. I can't say more than that. You can pick your own land, and you can't go far wrong. There's a pulp mill within fifty miles, and they'll take all the spruce you can cut. That's where your first money will come from."

Merrick stored this and much more away in his head, talked about it with Julie half the night, and came back next day with his mind made up. He found both railway and government ready to help in a practical fashion; and that is how, just two months after the Gilesby case was decided, he and Julie were watching the green shores of Lake Huron from the deck of a small scow, on which was loaded everything they possessed.

That first night on Bass River was unforgettable. The stream turned at a right angle just before it entered the lake, narrowing at the turn into a lovely bend, where the dark trees overhung the water, and a glimpse of the wider expanse was visible. Merrick had engaged two experienced men to stay with them till the log house was built. Meanwhile the men were

to live in their own tent, Julie and he in another. This latter had been pitched close to the water and floored with springy boughs of spruce.

The sun had just set, and a languid peace rested over land and lake. There was no sound save the sudden splash of a kingfisher as he hurled himself from his watching point into the glassy surface of Bass River, making the reflections of the trees shiver and shake in this shining mirror. The sky was painted with beds of glowing colors, into which the dark tops of the clustering spruce thrust like the pointed tops of a thousand minarets. It was all utterly peaceful, utterly vast, utterly unknown; and England seemed a million miles away.

"*Chéri*," whispered Julie, "I feel just a very little afraid. Am I silly to be thus?"

His arm went around her, and he drew her close.

"What is the dearest girl in Canada afraid of?"

"This." She made an indefinite gesture. "All this is so big, and we are so small, so very small—even you, *chéri*!"

"Yes, that's why we're here—to become part of something big; and you know," he added consolingly, "we're considered quite rich out here."

"With twelve hundred pounds—is that possible?"

"Rather! Very few settlers have as much. We're going to be very comfortable. I think I'll keep one of these men for a few months, and the worst of it will be over."

"But, *mon cher*, would he live with us? Is it not very *intime*?"

"It is the way of the country, darling. He won't mind it, if you don't; and men are very considerate to women out here, much more so than at home—I mean that sort of men."

"Then is it that I cook for him, too? Perhaps he will not like my cooking."

"In that case we'll get a man who does. What else are you thinking about?"

"That the mosquitoes are devouring my ankles, and that two months ago to-night we dined at Fleurian's. You remember that dinner, *chéri*?"

Merrick covered her ankles, and grinned reminiscently.

"Don't I? It would have paid this man's wages for a week; and the next morning I caught you trying to sell your

pearls—you senseless young person! Where are they now?"

She pulled up a little chamois bag that hung from her neck and spilled them into his brown palm—a hundred and ten of them, strung with a diamond clasp. It had been his wedding present, and it had cost him a good deal more than all that he had left after the Gilesby suit was concluded and the costs paid. Julie's eyes were very soft as she looked at them.

"So many lovely things we had to live with!" she said gently; "but now I do not think I shall miss them at all. I am glad you did not let me sell these. There is one reason, very special."

"Tell me!"

"Some day, *chéri*, we may have some one who is very dear to us, and she will also become very dear to some one else; and then we will give her these, to show that we, too, are happy about it. You had not thought of that, because you are only a man; but a woman thinks that way—yes, very often."

He restored the pearls, kissing the hand that received them. All he wanted for the immediate present was the chance to work, and that Julie should keep strong and well. He knew what was ahead, but to her the full realization could only come by degrees. He would find his outlet with ax and spade and plow in battle with the wilderness; but to her, constituted as she was, the life of a settler offered infinitely less. He must always remember that, and be to her husband, lover, companion, and friend all at once.

To his mind there was no comparison between this life of toil and freedom and grubbing along in England, in it but not of it, and surrounded by the things one was used to but could no longer have. To Julie, however, it might not be the same. It lay with him to make the difference as bearable as possible.

III

So the struggle began—the endless testing of man against the soil.

By early autumn they were comfortably housed in a log structure with walls eighteen inches thick and overhanging eaves, beneath which Merrick built a balcony the length of the building. Small, deep-set windows looked southeast and southwest, and for these Julie made chintz curtains, and inside them she set flowers planted in

tomato cans. The roof was of scoops—split cedar logs laid in corrugated fashion, very warm, tight, and safe.

The stable for the two horses was the same sort of building, but with a low roof, so that the heat of the animals' bodies should be not lost in winter months. And against that winter there was stored a pile of wood so great that Julie felt assured the tenth of it would never be used. In front of the house was the river, and just around the bend was the lake, whose wide surface now took on a steel-gray look that spoke of coming frost.

One morning there was a paper thickness of ice on Bass River, and in the skies were great arrowheads of wild geese, honking weirdly as they hastened southward. Winter was nearing the Merrick homestead.

There was a belated spell of fine weather, and then it came very swiftly, with a few scattered flakes and a new voice in the wind through the timber. That brought down a rain of ruddy leaves from the maples, which had been blazing with color for weeks past, leaving them stripped and gaunt. The skies became empty and colorless, and one morning Julie awoke to find that the whole world had turned white. It was very beautiful, but it rather frightened her.

Merrick was very busy now, cutting down spruce that would be towed to the pulp mill in spring. She heard the sound of axes all day, and sometimes she sat and watched the timber come thudding down into the deepening snow. She had never known a winter like this, being accustomed to the soft seasons of Touraine, when the valley of the Loire is wreathed in mist, and the river runs brimming past the naked vineyards; so the piercing cold sometimes struck to her heart.

At night she could hear the ice forming far out on the lake, with sharp reports like rifle firing. From the high ground to the north came the howl of a lone timber wolf, which seemed the very voice of desolation itself; but she never complained.

It was an event when a missionary priest passed that way—a Jesuit, one of the successors of those valiant men who first penetrated this solitude—and Julie talked French to him for hours. The next morning he strapped on his snowshoes, gave her his blessing, and tramped on, wondering a good deal why men did not wait till they had broken in the wilderness before they

asked women like this to come and share it with them.

That night her eyes were so wistful that Merrick, questioning his own judgment, said he had a splendid idea for her.

"But what is it, *chéri*?"

"Well, you see, in May I shall be paid for all this timber, and we have lived here more cheaply than I expected; so would not the prettiest girl in Canada like a trip to England, and perhaps to France?"

"How lovely!" cried Julie. "When could you start?"

"I would not go, darling—just you."

"Alone?"

"Why not? There's a heap for me to do, and I can't run away from my job. This place is going to be a good farm in three years. Why shouldn't you spend the summer on the other side?"

The light slowly died in her eyes, and her heart, so happy a moment ago, felt suddenly heavy. She looked at this husband of hers. How generous he was! A bigger man, too, stronger and finer than a year ago. Nothing of Bond Street or Piccadilly about him now, but a harder expression in his eye, more decision in his face, more gravity in his manner. He had the appearance of one who has set himself a difficult task and is succeeding; and she knew in that moment that she could never leave him.

"That is just like you, Sidney, so thoughtful you always are; but my place is here." She sent him a tender smile. "Is it that I do not really help much?"

"You blessed creature, you help more than I can tell you; but I see now what I didn't see before."

"And that is?"

"You weren't meant to spend your life cooking and washing dishes."

She shook her head, very quickly and daintily, and it struck him in that instant how dainty she still was, in spite of everything. No toil or hardship could ever destroy that exquisite delicacy.

"Then, *mon cher*, I also see what I did not see before. I love my husband—oh, so much more than when he had a title!—and since it is happiness to be with the one we love best, then I am most happy here. Not for anything would I go to England, or even to my own France; and next year, it will be better here, is it not?"

Merrick choked a little.

"Are you sure—quite, quite sure?"

"So sure that we will not speak of it any more. Was it the visit of Father Favette that made you speak thus?"

"Perhaps—I don't know. It has been in my head for some time."

She patted the big, strong hand.

"We shall stay together, you and I, *chéri*, so long as it is permitted."

This was her way of putting it. Merrick was so much relieved that he felt younger and happier, and went about his work with a new courage, worshipping her with all his soul.

Julie thought about that talk for many days. So long as it was permitted! Something whispered that perhaps this might not be for so very long. Her breast felt cold. She knew in her heart that she was not made of the stuff to withstand a life like this. Other women—yes, those with big bones and plenty of blood and flesh, who could eat like men and could almost work like men. Such women bore their husbands children like themselves. She wanted to give her husband a child, too—one that would speak of her when this country, later on, was not so hard and forbidding. He might need that child—might need it greatly.

IV

JULIE put this thought away in her heart, saying nothing, while winter deepened, and laid an icy hand over the country of the Hurons. She had never dreamed of such cold. The men came in at noon and at night with their mustaches in blocks of ice, and the snow on the scoop roof was three feet deep.

Sometimes, when the sun was bright, she went out, trying to avoid the wind; but snowshoes seemed unmanageable for her tiny feet, and she did not get much farther than the beaten trail that led to the water hole. This was frozen solid each morning. The stove was stuffed with wood every night, and the pile of fuel at the door often had to be replenished. A few people came that way, mostly Indians with furs and venison for sale, and Father Favette stopped in as often as he could; but otherwise Bass River was lost to the outer world.

Out in the bush sounded the dull blows of axes, and the piles of logs on the river bank swelled daily. It was clean spruce, and would bring a good price, but Merrick, watching his wife's small, pinched face,

was conscious of a slowly growing fear. They knew now that they were to have their hearts' desire, and it was hard that fear should have a place with so wonderful an event.

Soon he saw that he must take her to the nearest settlement, fifty miles away. She would come back, and not alone, after the ice broke up.

Julie, with a wonderful expression in her eyes, consented. Only God knew what she really thought and felt.

The only road lay over the ice. Merrick doubted if they could make the distance in one day, and prepared, if necessary, to spend a night in shelter of the bush, where, with a fire and plenty of blankets, one could be comfortable. He took the man with him to look after the horses and leave him free for Julie.

She looked more *petite* than ever, wrapped up in blankets and buffalo robes, and nestled down in a pile of meadow hay with which Merrick had covered the sledge floor. The horses' feet rang like steel on the ice, and the densely wooded shores slipped by, mile after mile, cedar, spruce, hemlock, and pine, with never a sign of life, save when a ragged-pinioned raven sailed over the tree tops with his strange, harsh cry.

Julie watched the passing landscape silently, her face grave, her eyes turning often to her husband with a long look of wistful love. It may have been the ravens, which she took to be birds of evil omen, or perhaps it was just the sheer desolation of this empty world that stirred in her the grim conviction that she was beholding it for the last time. She was almost sure of that.

It was her secret, too, that she was very tired, that she knew she had never been meant for the life of a pioneer. If it were not for her present hopes, she would be content to fold her hands and sleep forever and ever; but the man she loved with all her valiant soul must never know that.

"*Chéri*," she whispered presently, "will you tell me something?"

"Anything, darling."

"Truly—oh, so very truly?"

"I have never told you anything but the truth. What is it?"

"Then have I made it hard for you having me here?"

"Hard? Julie, you're dreaming! I could never have tackled it alone; and

you've done just as much as I have—indeed more."

"But that is not possible! I have thought about it so much, and so often wished that I might have been big and strong and—yes, a good cook, who would not need the so many things we have in France to use in the kitchen. A casserole does not serve in Canada, when one has no chickens and so little of which to make sauces; and my bread so often it was very heavy—oh, I know that, though you and Bill never said a word, but only asked for more. Every time you asked for more I wanted to cry. Then I would see you gulp, and pretend not to choke, for my sake; but in spite of my cooking you are well and strong, is it not?"

Merrick did choke at that, and without attempting to hide it.

"You blessed child, your cooking was just right. I never tasted nicer meals; but when you come back you won't have any to do at all. So cheer up, and don't you dare tell stories about yourself!"

She smiled at him, lifting his fingers to her lips.

"And to-night we sleep in the woods?"

"Yes, and you'll be as happy as a clam, and a good deal warmer!"

"You remember that first night on Bass River, after they took the boat away—how wonderful it was! The river talked to us, did it not? And the new house, the one you will build by and by—that will be out on the point, yes?"

He nodded.

"Yes, opposite the narrowest part. We'll have a bridge there some day, and people driving past."

"You will always keep that land, will you not, *mon cher*, because you found this, and made it into good land out of the forest. It is not like the place in England that once was yours, where there was nothing to do but live on it. You see, Sidney, a great deal of you and just a little bit of me has gone into that land of ours. So if it is a boy that we shall have, he will do the same thing when he is big and strong; and if it is a girl, you will give that land to her. Is my husband content?"

"Yes," he said very gently. "Yes—that's just right."

"And the boy we would call Sidney, for his father, and the—"

"The girl Juliette, for her mother," he smiled.

She nodded, and closed her eyes, seeming happy to have this arranged, when suddenly there came a shout from the driver and a crashing sound, at which her husband sprang up. The sledge gave a lurch.

"Jump!" yelled the other man. "For God's sake jump!"

The horses had dropped up to their necks in water, and the ice under the sledge had yielded. Merrick leaped clear, and, turning, dragged Julie out, just as a black flood lipped the top of the long wooden box in which she lay bundled. He hoped in his soul that the icy water had not touched her.

He ran to the horses' heads. If they went under, the end was not far off. Two miles to shore, and a bitter wind!

There was but one way in which to try and save the team—by cutting them free of the harness, twisting their necks till they floated on their sides, and then pulling them out over the edge of the ice by sheer force. They tried it with one horse, while Julie lay and watched with terrified eyes; but it proved to be a job for more than two men. Finally Merrick gave it up with a groan, and rescued what he could from the sledge.

In a short half hour they were alone on insecure ice, twenty miles from the settlement, and with a woman to care for.

"The bush!" said Merrick grimly. "Run ahead and make the biggest fire you can. Make two, ten feet apart!"

They spent the night thus, husband and wife, in the cracking frost, while the driver went on afoot for help. Julie lay very silent, the flames touching her drawn face into false color, while she saved her strength for that which was yet to come. She spoke to Merrick only with her dark eyes, trying to tell him not to be anxious, that all would be well with her, and that no real harm had been done, except the loss of the horses.

He understood perfectly, and did not tire her with questions. He smiled encouragingly when he put a cup of hot soup to her lips. Then she slept.

Help came in twelve hours, and, reaching the settlement safely, Julie was put to bed in the cottage hospital attached to the pulp mill. Merrick came in to see her that night before she went to sleep. She put her arms round his neck, drawing his head down on her breast.

"My husband!" she whispered—ah, so

tenderly! "My own, own husband! I am so happy to have been with you all these years!"

V

NATURE has a multitude of moods. She afflicts, scourges, and tests. She rewards, encourages, and strengthens. Man cannot successfully defy her, but, allying himself with her, drawing his fortitude from the soil and his confidence from the skies, he may so combine himself with nature as to make her his friend and not his enemy; and to those who labor thus with fidelity and understanding she yields of her best.

Thus it was with Sidney Merrick. He had in him, though he had not known it in former years, the stuff of which pioneers are built. He could not know it till, ax in hand, he began to hew out a home in the woods, and to fashion for himself that for which he should owe no man anything.

Not long afterward there came others to Bass River—settlers who had realized that they might go farther afield and fare much worse; so around his, the first homestead, spread other clearings, each with its log house and stable, and loneliness was at an end.

He did not know whether he was glad or sorry. Eighteen years had passed since Julie had left him with a pledge of her undying love, and for eighteen years he had labored, buying more land, taking contracts for timber, and, in general, using his experience so wisely that there was no real need to work any longer. The lake steamers stopped regularly at Bass River, other settlements were dotted along the shore, and the first phase of the pioneers' life was over.

He was a quiet man now, his mind entirely centered on Juliette and his land. He worshiped the girl with a devotion that sometimes frightened him; and for the land—especially that first section, which was so much a part of himself and of one other—he felt more than the pride of ownership. It was so different, he thought, from inheriting a few patriarchal acres, for which one had done nothing one's self!

He had sent Juliette to one of the best schools in Canada, but he looked forward to her holidays even more than she did herself—this child who had never seen her mother.

She knew some of the early history, but not all. Merrick had never told her about

the Gilesby case, because that information would profit her nothing and might fill her mind with useless thoughts; nor had she learned what happened immediately before her birth. That was too poignant, and he could not bear to rehearse it. All she knew of that period was that her mother had given her life for her child. Juliette had a misty picture of that mother, very tender and sweet, and she loved to hear about the early days, and the founding of the Bass River settlement.

That summer—the one in which she finished school—there was talk along Bass River about the coming railway. Merrick alone seemed unimpressed. What he saw was that the natural crossing of the stream was at the point which projected in the middle of his original homestead, for a bridge built there would be shorter by hundreds of feet than anywhere else.

He had loved that first log cabin too much to destroy it. Now there was a garden in front and behind, and flowers still bloomed in the deep-set windows. He used the cabin as a study and reading room. It had a big fireplace where he would sit and feel that he was not alone, that somewhere close to him there moved a sweet and gracious tenant whose memory had never faded. When Juliette was at home, she felt happier there than anywhere else. It would all be hers, some day.

Merrick was back in the bush, tramping over ground that he had recently purchased, and Juliette was reading in her garden, when she heard a fresh, clear English voice at her shoulder.

"Could you please tell me where I'll find Mr. Merrick?"

She looked up and saw a tall young man, who regarded her with a surprised interest, and immediately blushed.

"He's back in the woods, and won't be here till evening." Then, for some unknown reason, she blushed herself. "Do you want to see him?"

"My boss does. We're camped about a mile south of here, and we have to run a line across the river."

"The railway!" she said excitedly. "You're building that?"

He smiled at her, and instinctively she smiled back.

"No—we're just surveying to see where it will be built. We run the line and put in stakes, and the contractors come along and do the rest."

"But why does any one want to see father about it?"

"Well, this is his property, isn't it?"

"Of course."

"Then we want his permission to run the line."

"Through here—through this garden?"

He smiled again.

"We wouldn't hurt the garden—I promise you that. Of course, later on—but that's a matter of business. I'm only an engineer."

She tried to be vexed, and failed completely. He had flaxen hair and blue eyes in which there floated a suggestion of mirthfulness very hard to resist, and there were tones in his voice that Juliette liked exceedingly.

At the same time he was regarding her much more closely than she imagined. He missed nothing of the smooth, oval face, the large, dark, level eyes—her mother's eyes, they were—and the lovely curve of cheek and neck. He felt quite bewildered at finding a girl like this on the banks of Bass River.

"I don't think father will want you to run the line through here," she said doubtfully.

"Indeed? Every one else is keen on it."

"I know, but he isn't. You see"—she hesitated, and went on uncertainly—"he would hate to have this place cut up by a railway. Isn't there plenty of room somewhere else?"

"Yes, but somewhere else wouldn't be half as good, and would cost twice as much. Of course, it isn't my show at all, but just between ourselves the road has to come through here."

She flushed a little.

"Has to?"

He nodded.

"You know, it isn't my job to say a word, but I'd like awfully to be of some use, if I could, in getting the thing straightened out to please you. In this country, when a railway gets its government charter, it can build anywhere it sees fit. You didn't know that, did you?"

She shook her charming head anxiously.

"No, of course not. That means that you don't really have to ask leave to run the line across here at all?"

"That's just it; but the boss is a decent sort, and likes to be civil. Back in the settlement they're handing us bouquets of welcome."

She laughed in spite of herself.

"And here are plenty of flowers, but no bouquets?"

"It's a little that way. I say, may I be fearfully cheeky and ask a question? It might help me to be of use."

"Yes," she said wonderingly.

"Then, though it isn't my business at all, may I ask why your father doesn't want the line through here?"

She liked him for that—it was so simple and honest.

"It's because he came here straight from England to make a home for himself and mother. The first years were awfully hard, and she died. They lived here in this cabin, with no one nearer than fifty miles. He had never expected to have to work like that, but he had lost his money very suddenly. Then he built up what you see, and a good deal more; but the cabin means much more to him than the big house. He loves it dearly, though it always reminds him of the past."

The young man nodded gravely.

"I see!" he said under his breath, and sent her a look of complete understanding. "I'll tell the boss that, if I may, but"—here his blue eyes were rather disturbed—"I'm afraid it won't affect the result."

"The line would have to go through, anyway?"

"Yes. This survey might go around it—that wouldn't matter so much to the head office; but we've got to take soundings and survey the river on both sides of the point, and when the party comes along to make the final location—which will be very soon now—they would bring a legal notice, to which your father would have to submit. I do wish I could help!" he added earnestly, with another long look.

"You can't change the railway, can you?"

He grinned.

"Not by an inch! It's all a question of the easiest and best location. Nothing else counts."

"Do you think," she asked slowly, "that you could go around just this time? That would give me time to talk to father. You see," she went on, with a look on her face that set his pulses jumping, "I don't want him to oppose what every one else wishes for so much. He would not mean to be selfish—he couldn't really be so; but others might think that he was." She stopped abruptly, and bit her lip. "Is it awfully

wrong to talk to a perfect stranger like this?"

"It's awfully decent of you to talk to me at all," he replied swiftly. "It's wonderful to talk to some one like you! I've hardly met any one since I came out from England."

"When was that?"

"Nearly three years ago now. My father told me to clear out and do some work, and I rather like it; but I'll have to go back later on, I suppose."

"Why?"

"Well," he said rather awkwardly, "there's the property—I shall be expected to live on that, and—oh, one thing and another!"

"I'd love to go to England, but," she put in with a little laugh, "I have property, too—at least, I will have."

He made a gesture.

"This?"

She nodded.

"It's coming to me when I'm of age."

"So I'll be helping to build a railway across your land?"

"Yes, and I'll be very glad if I can convince father; but will you survey around it, just this time?"

"I'll talk to the boss now. He's a good deal of a diplomatist. I say, my name is Phillips. Of course I know who you are, and"—here he flushed a little—"may I call again? It's awfully nice to get out of camp and talk to—some one like this. Perhaps your father and my people might know each other."

"Perhaps, but he hardly ever mentions England now. My mother was French, and they came out soon after they were married; but she couldn't stand it. She wasn't strong enough."

"It must have been pretty stiff here twenty years ago," he said thoughtfully, "especially for a woman. I say, would you mind telling me your other name?"

"Juliette. Why?"

He laughed happily.

"Mine is Arthur. I haven't seen a girl like you since I came to Canada, and I didn't want to think about you just as Miss Merrick. Thanks ever so much!"

VI

HE strode off and waved his hand at the gate. Juliette promptly forgot all about her book, which wasn't very interesting. The young Englishman had been some-

thing quite new to her, too, and different, as her father was different from most of the other men at Bass River. There was nothing of the snob in her, but she recognized her own kind. It was odd that he was going to have property, too, and she wished that their holdings were not so far apart.

She wondered how he would put the survey question to the other man, and found herself looking forward to his coming back with the news; and after that she wondered about a great many other things, quite new and charming, so that she was greatly surprised when it was six o'clock, and she saw her father dismounting.

She went to him, feeling that she must be very wise and diplomatic; so she said nothing about what was in her mind till it was nearly time to go to bed. Then, curiously enough, it was he who brought the matter up. He had been smoking rather silently.

"I came across some surveyors to-day, daughter."

"For the railway?"

He nodded.

She studied his face, feeling that this was a time to be very tactful. She knew what he was thinking about, for the lines around his mouth were hard. Watching him thus, and realizing what the past meant for him, her heart went out to him all the more.

"Dad," she said slowly, "you told me long ago that you and mother came out here because you had lost your money."

"Yes."

"But you've told me very little about what happened before that—what the money was in, or how you lost it—and about your friends and mother's. You see I'm quite grown up now, and I think about it all a great deal. Don't you love England any more?"

He winced at that. Love England! He had never ceased to love her. Pictures of England—her chalk cliffs looking out on the wrinkled sea, her misty coverts, her wide, smooth fields, her spires pricking into the gray horizon, all her ancient charm and mystical appeal—these had never left him from the moment he set foot in a Canadian forest, and began to build himself a home in a far and solitary country; but England had, in a sense, been taken away from him.

She offered him nothing that he could do, and survive and mingle with his own

kind. Perhaps that was his own fault; but this tree-covered land, where so lately the timber wolf had wandered down to the water and stared across the inland sea, this wilderness, had said to him:

"Come, prove yourself a man, and I will give you of mine own!"

Well, he had done that without flinching; and though the wilderness had taken from him what he loved best, his labor had returned to him a thousandfold. Here, where his feet were planted, here where the woman he had loved slept so long and dreamlessly, here was home. This spot where she had shared with him the danger and the burden was sacred ground. The railway could find another path.

Something broke loose in his heart at the thought.

"Listen, child!" he said. "I want to tell you something."

He talked to her for an hour, while she sat holding his hand, wistful, very silent, her breast throbbing with sympathy and understanding. She saw it all so clearly now, and this place, this corner of a great country with its illimitable expanse, would always have a new and poignant significance for her.

She visioned her mother as never before. She looked with dim eyes at the windows where those small hands had planted the first English flowers that ever blossomed on the shores of Bass River. The garden was full of them now, all sprung from those lovingly tended seeds.

The thought of that set up a quick and unexpected sequence in the girl's mind. It was, she felt, rather beautiful, but this was not the time for her to speak of it.

"I see it all so much better now!" she said softly. "Dad, I've always wanted to know about it. Mother paid the price for what we have, didn't she?"

"Yes, darling—she paid. It's generally the woman who pays, in the beginning, in a country like this. I didn't realize that when we decided to come."

"But don't you think that perhaps she did realize it, and yet was quite willing to come?"

His mind sped back to that dinner at Fleurian's, when Julie learned that she could no longer have a maid. From that moment she had never faltered. And those last words of hers! She was so happy to have had so many years with him. She knew then what was coming!

"I think she saw things that I didn't see," he answered slowly. "She was a great deal alone through the day. One couldn't help that."

"Are you sorry you came, dad?"

Merrick could not answer that, and walked over to the cabin, where he sat quite alone till dawn was breaking. He was trying to persuade himself that Julie was better off now than if they had stayed in England, and had lived as they knew they would have had to live.

VII

As it happened, the surveyors did not reach the settlement at once, because instructions arrived from Montreal to run a branch line up country with a view to possible future construction. Phillips learned this when he returned to camp, and, realizing that the question of access to the Merrick property was not now so pressing, very wisely said nothing. And, after that, there came orders to survey for a harbor. Whereupon the engineers settled down for a month's solid work at Bass River.

To Juliette and the young Englishman it was a very wonderful period. They had discovered each other, and each time they met the discovery seemed more complete. He brought into her dreams visions of England and of the outer, wider world. She looked forward to the evenings when he came in his canoe and they paddled along the lake shore, or far up Bass River, where the shadows lay deep and the timber marched unbroken to the water's edge.

The young man had made himself acceptable to Merrick, being, indeed, much what Merrick was at the same age, with the same straight back and the same honest look in his eyes.

Merrick was fighting with himself now, knowing what was ahead. The railway company could take such part of his property as they found necessary, and the price would be settled by arbitration. It was not the question of price that disturbed him, but the destruction of the cabin that was still the home of his heart.

Then it came to an evening when the two who had found each other drifted idly over water like molten glass, and the young man, trailing his paddle, looked into the eyes of the girl he loved. He had never told her that he loved her, partly through fear that all this was only a vision which might end as suddenly as it began; but

they both knew, and that made the world a very wonderful place.

"The boss told me this morning that we've got to run the line across the river next week, and—and move on," Arthur said.

"Oh!" Juliette's voice was uncertain.

"Yes. I've never said anything to him about what we talked of that first time. The work was changed, so I thought you'd rather I didn't."

"I'm glad!"

A turn of the paddle, and the canoe touched shore.

"Come and sit down for a minute," said Arthur. "There's something else I want to tell you."

She got out, her heart beating fast, and they sat where a carpet of moss spread under the cedars. It was utterly quiet here, with not even a murmur from the river.

"You see," he began, a flush creeping into his tanned cheeks, "I have wanted to tell you this before. When I saw you that first time, you seemed to have dropped straight out of the clouds. I could hardly believe it."

"Was anything the matter with me?" she asked provocatively.

He laughed with sheer joy.

"The matter! No, but there was with me. I've never got over it, and I never shall."

"I thought engineers were never surprised at anything."

"We're not supposed to be—in engineering. This is slightly different."

She sent him a demoralizing glance.

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

He was very deeply in love with her, but he felt that this was such a marvelous moment that it ought to last a little longer.

"May I read your hand?"

She gave it to him—a brown and very slender hand. He did his best not to hold it too tightly, and to keep his voice steady.

"You have a long, unbroken heart line, and—"

"What does that mean?"

"Just that your heart's never going to give you any trouble."

"The doctor told me it wouldn't," she countered.

"I'm not talking about your physical heart."

"Oh! Well?"

"And you're soon going to take a long journey across the water, and—"

"They all say that, don't they? And I suppose I shall meet a dark man?"

"Not at all! Your journey will be with a fair one," he replied sternly. "You're going to be frightfully happy, and have no worry about anything, and have practically everything you want—that is," he added, "if you don't want the earth. Your head line is very good for a girl, too, and thank Heaven it doesn't cross with your heart—and your heart"—here he choked a little—"is pure gold, and will you give it to me?"

"Do you mean that?" she whispered, her cheeks lovely with changing color.

"I love you better than—oh, Juliette, darling, don't you know how I love you?"

They came to themselves a few minutes later, to discover a totally different world. Amazing that it could be so different! They had a thousand things to say to each other, but these were continually interrupted by breathless moments in which they could only gaze at each other and wonder if anything even remotely approaching this had ever happened before. Then, suddenly, she thought of her father.

"I wonder what he will say! And what about yours, Ar-Arthur?"

"Mine's all right," he assured her. "What about yours?"

She was not so certain. It would be dreadfully lonely for him, if she went away.

"I don't know. If he would come and live in England, it would make things so much easier!"

"Well, you'll be there."

"I wonder when!" she murmured.

He looked at her hungrily.

"Just as soon as ever it's possible. I've got enough to marry on, and there's a good deal more coming. I say, I've rather a secret, but I won't tell you till after I've seen your father."

"A secret from me?"

Her brow was wrinkling, and it took a certain amount of attention to smooth it out.

"Yes—it really has to do with both of us, after we're married. I never thought much about it till the last month or so, and I don't think you'll mind when you know. When can I see your father? Lord, I wish that was over!"

She looked at him so that he felt a little dizzy.

"This is my first experience, and I don't know how long the man generally waits."

"This one won't wait at all. To-night?"

She managed to convey that the morrow might be better.

"I'll have to tell him, too—I mean about the railway," she added.

"By Jove, that means both his land and his daughter at the same time!"

"Not all of either," she smiled. "And why do you put the land first?"

They paddled down Bass River rather silently, some things being beyond words, and he held her close for a wonderful moment when they said good night. Then the sight of her father in the log cabin, and the flower boxes in the deep-set windows, reminded her of what she had yet to do; so, putting aside her own great joy, and thinking only of him, she went in, pulled up a stool, and sat with her shoulder against his knee.

"Dad," she said presently, "did you hear that the surveyors are to carry their line across the river next week?"

She felt him stiffen a little.

"Did Phillips tell you?"

"Yes, this evening. Dad, may I say something about it?"

"Anything, darling."

She had been very much in his mind of late. Of course, he would not be able to keep her very much longer—it was not to be expected with such a girl—and it would leave a great vacancy. He had been musing about England, too.

"The flowers in these windows made me think of it," she began softly; "because they were the first flowers you planted here. They were pioneers, too, weren't they?"

"Yes," he smiled, "I suppose they were."

"It's like what you and mother did—taking the first and hardest, and making it all easier for the rest. Life here has become more gentle and human on account of your beginning. I often think of that, and the people all over this district realize it. They often speak of it to me. If they say nothing to you, it's because they think you want to forget about the past. And now this railway—"

She broke off, and glanced at him appealingly.

"Well?" he said with great tenderness.

"I know so well what you feel, but if mother were here she would wish the railway to come in. It would mean so much to her, just as it will to all the other women. In a way it would be a sort of monument

to her. I think that when she was alive she must often have longed to hear the sound of a train."

"Yes, child—I know she did."

"This log house—couldn't you move it and rebuild it some spot where it will never be disturbed, and use it for something that—oh, a children's hospital!"

There was a catch in her breath.

He shut his eyes, and, putting out his hand, rested it on her dark head. Her mother was speaking to him now in that well remembered tone, saying that all was right with her, and that this was what she would have him do, for the sake of the child she died to bear. She was not in the old cabin any longer, but she still lived in his heart. She wanted him to be happy with Juliette, and to cut the cord that for years he had knotted so tightly around his breast.

Love could not die, but persisted forever, expressing itself in deeds and thoughts for others. And there was always youth—youth with its high confidence and pride and beauty—youth, in whose hands it lay to remake the world. Only by allying itself with youth in the sharing of joys and sorrows could old age or middle age taste the real essence of life.

"There won't be any difficulty about the land," he said quietly. "Is that all, child?"

She looked up at him, and suddenly she was in his arms.

"Dad, dad, I'm so—oh, happy isn't the word for it!"

He stroked her hair.

"I've not been completely blind. Tell me about him."

That is how it happened that when Arthur, whose heart was in his mouth, called on Merrick the next evening, and told a very plain, straight tale, he found his path much easier than he had expected. The older man listened, smiling; and by pure chance Juliette was just outside the window and heard every word.

"I've a thousand a year of my own," the boy concluded; "but father thought it better for me to do some work before I settled down. Now I shall always want to work at something; but of course I'm only half an engineer yet."

He paused, hesitated, flushed, and seemed much embarrassed.

"What's the horrible secret?" asked Merrick.

"Well, sir, there's something I haven't mentioned to Juliette, but I've got to tell you now. It sounds queer to be saying it here"—he glanced out of the window, over Juliette's head, at the wide expanse of Lake Huron—"because I know that sort of thing doesn't go for very much in Canada, but—"

Juliette, lifting her head as far as she dared, almost ceased to breathe.

"You'd better put me out of pain," said Merrick. "What is it?"

"You see, sir," stammered Arthur, "when I first came here, I was told who you were, and my uncle—that's my mother's elder brother, and he's seventy now—well, sir, when he dies I shall come into the title. I shall be Lord Gilesby."

THE DAY IS RICH

The day is rich with our discoveries
When we can find two lonely roads like these—
Far from the roads where villages are hung
Like cheap beads on a necklace overstrung;
For here, beyond the sound of horn or wheel,
The forest has a silence you can feel.

What empty intercourse with all the crowds
Was worth these bright encounters with the clouds,
Where, fleeing men and women, we can see
What I have done with time and you with me?

The night with whispers holds us in its deeps;
Becalmed, with us, a sea of tree tops sleeps.
Two lonely roads like these, one up, one down,
Are sweet to find away from any town,
And where no billboard mars the night or noon
Or bids us use some new commercial moon!

Charles Divine

None of This Stuff With Rings

TELLING HOW A BEAUTIFUL PLATONIC FRIENDSHIP WAS
SPOILED BY THE STRATEGY OF A SCHEMING GIRL

By Mary Carolyn Davies

"THAT'S what we'll be—sweethearts in name only," he said. "None of this stuff with diamond rings!"

"I get an escort," I agreed, "and you get a girl to tell your troubles to, and no strings anywhere."

"That's it!" said Ted, frankly pleased with himself and his idea. "The good old platonic friendship!"

I nodded.

"A fellow no sooner takes a girl to the movies twice, or home from church three times, than she begins saying, 'What kind of furniture shall we have?'" he went on, wrathfully developing his thesis.

I felt guilty. I knew that girls were the first to get the furniture complex as a result of a casual petting party or two; but one hates to have men know us so well. The modern man is altogether too frank, if you ask me. Men are supposed to think us mysterious, but the men of to-day don't believe there's any mystery about us. Of course there isn't; but it is disillusioning of them to let us know that they know it.

Ted Lewis was the most disillusioned and disillusioning of the modern men I'd met—perhaps because his flapper sister, Nyla, my chum, wasn't the sort to conceal her lip stick or her inmost thoughts.

"A man wants to be the pursuer, not the pursued," Ted proclaimed. "He wants to choose the girl, and then ask her in his own time." He was warming to his subject. For all his tone was so sophisticated, his curly blond hair made him look a mere boy. "Why must a girl try to hurry matters? Why doesn't she wait until she's asked?" he demanded. "Tell me that, Marna Carr!"

"Sometimes a girl gets tired of waiting," I put in acidly.

"If she doesn't like it, why doesn't she say so, and start going with some one who's the other type—who wants a home, the way she does? There's nothing to keep her from it, is there? The man would be the first to tell her to go ahead. He would calmly say, 'Use your own judgment.'"

"That's what hurts her so—to feel that he doesn't care whether she goes or stays," I explained.

"Well, if he never pretended to? If he was honest about it from the first?" Ted was building up a case out of his imagination, and getting tremendously interested in it. "I like girls. I like to talk to 'em. I like to have a girl's companionship. I get more of a kick out of a show if I'm with a girl. I don't want to pick up one, either. It has to be a girl I know well; but, dash it, by the time you get to know a girl well enough to enjoy going out with her, she begins wanting you to marry her! Now *you're* sensible, Marna. You're not like most of them. You understand how a fellow feels."

"Don't worry—I won't be wanting to marry you," I assured him. "I feel just as you do about it. Imagine the blessed relief of having a man take you out for an entire evening without abusing you because you won't marry him!"

So began our friendship. We had both been hurt in love. Both had been engaged, and had broken the engagements with the usual painful memories and heartaches; so he proposed that we should "go together," our understanding being that it was only until a third person came along that either

cared more for. He didn't want to hurt me, and he was too honest to say "love."

When we first met, we were both lonely, with the terrible loneliness that comes when one has spent all one's evenings with one person and then suddenly has to realize that one will never see that person again. Nyla was sorry for us both. That was why she brought us together. She and I had been boarding school chums, and I had met her brother casually long before this, but had never really known him.

Ted Lewis dreaded marriage—especially now. He was a poet at heart, a rebel, a dreamer. How well I understood him, because I am made of the same effervescent, soap-bubble stuff myself! I dreaded practical things, I chafed against bonds. I dreaded marriage, too—but with him?

Soon I knew that with him it would have been different. We two could have made of marriage a gay adventure, a seeing-the-world trip, a free, high, splendid thing; but he did not know that, and I could not tell him.

All through the ages it has been woman's part to wait, but I had never waited before. I had always had so many suitors—when I had not wanted them; and now Ted was the only one I wanted, the only one I would ever want.

II

We were just chums. Ted didn't care for me, and the older man did. Roderick Bollman could protect me, too—in a money way, in every way. He was big and strong, assured, self-possessed. He wasn't a millionaire, but he was substantial—the kind of man who not only would want to give you everything, but would really do it. There's so much difference, these days! Any girl would be lucky to get Roderick. So I had been told by all my relatives and friends—even by Nyla.

Well, he might do for any girl, but not for me, I thought disdainfully. However, he did not despair. He just went on quietly building up a wall of refuge for me out of tiny acts of thoughtfulness, each one small, but oh, how patient he was, and how many of them he placed one on top of the other!

He never hurt my feelings by showing his aversion to marriage, or by sitting a little farther away in the front seat of his car when the moon was full and the trees were particularly lovely in their black,

swaying, fringed beauty against the gray-white sky. Ted—there was no getting around it—was cautious; and how a girl, even if she doesn't want him to propose, does hate a cautious man! But I did want Ted to propose. I wanted him to care, to suffer, to know, as I knew, that a platonic friendship may lead to love.

He did guess—that was the trouble. His caution came from the fact that he didn't want to hurt me. He was afraid that I would come to care, and would be hurt when we parted. It had always been understood that either of us could break away at any moment, and the other was not to mind. How I dreaded that moment—the end!

In the meantime, how splendid our companionship was! We drove, canoed, hiked, danced, dined, read, and skated together. Our lives consisted of each other. And yet—Ted didn't love me. There was never anything in his eyes but friendliness. I was a sister to him, a pal, a chum, a partner. How I came to hate that word "partner"! It seemed to mean so much to him.

"I never had a girl chum like this before," he said.

I knew he had not. Ever since he shed knee trousers, his life had been a series of wild and fervent love affairs—high-souled, sincere, idealistic love affairs, each one of which, at the time, he was firmly convinced was the real one. None of that passionate dreaming went into his comradeship with me. He kissed me—yes, and fondled my hair, but his hand was cool and unhurried on my cheek, his lips were quick and respectful on mine when he said good night.

One night we drove along the river road, with the trees in the moon and ferns straggling into the glow of our headlights. His hand on the wheel was so strong, so quiet, so sure! He stopped the car in a dark, piny spot off the road and kissed me.

"Oh!" I cried. "I know it's only for a little while, but I feel as if—you're my man! In my heart I feel that way."

"Don't feel that way. Just feel that we're friends."

His tone was gentle, but troubled.

"Surely," I agreed. "That's what I meant. Just for a minute, though—oh, it was only a mood."

I must never let him think I cared, or I would lose his friendship—I knew that well. He would leave me, for my own sake, for my own peace of mind, if he

guessed that there was anything but platonic liking for him in my thoughts.

After that I was more careful than ever. I warned Nyla not to let Ted know that I cared; for of course she knew. Girls always know those things. She and I talked it all over one day, as I was driving her to golf in my car.

"He feels as if I am sitting about waiting for a proposal, ready to pounce on the least tender word he says and hold him to it like a love *Shylock*," I said.

She nodded.

"Aren't men beastly? — Theodore especially!" she said.

She moved out of the way of the dripping flower vase, and I slowed down a little.

"I don't really want to be married," I explained, swerving for a bunch of boy scouts on bicycles; "but I'd love to have him want me to want to."

"Sure!" said Nyla sympathetically.

"I'd like to be proposed to, I'll admit," I said; "but I'm only wishing for a compliment—not for a kitchen to scrub. If he would just see that!"

"Of course!" she agreed. "It's just because Theodore won't ask you that you want him to. I always feel like that. Give me one of those hard-boiled clams, and I'll never rest until he wakes up."

"But Ted—"

"I should say so!" said she.

We understood each other.

"He looks upon me as a trap," I told her; "and how men hate traps! The cheese is companionship. His daily problem is to get a nibble of cheese, and keep just out of reach of the jaws of the trap. He has become very adroit at it, but he never forgets for a moment that the trap is there, and that he must be cautious and wary and very sure to keep far enough away."

"That's Ted," she assented, and I nodded sadly.

"A hasty good-by kiss," I went on, "while the engine is running, is so much better tactics than a more friendly one with the lights shut off. It's quicker, too, and kinder to the girl," I added sarcastically, "than keeping her up too late and making her sleepy the next day. Oh, it's so much kinder to the girl!"

"Yes, that's his line. That's Ted. You've got him, Marna."

"Worst is, he actually thinks it. He's not a hypocrite."

I had to do Teddy justice.

"I believe he *does* care, but he'll never realize it," mused Nyla. "It would take an earthquake to shake him into realizing it. It would take something terrific; but what—what?" She bent forward, unseeing, thinking, thinking. "I don't know yet, but I'll think of it some day, and, whatever it is, I'll do it, Marna. There's my hand on it!"

She laid her hand over mine on the shiny wheel.

And then we laughed and got out at the clubhouse and walked out into the heavenly sunshine on the heavenly grass, and for a whole afternoon we played and forgot such unpleasant things as love. After tea, Ted, who had appeared from somewhere, sent Nyla and a group of gayly-sweated girls home in his car, while he joined me in mine.

"Want to drive?" I asked.

"No—you. I like to watch you vamp the cops," he answered, settling back lazily and removing his gray silk ankles from the drip of the vase. "Nice roses," he added.

"Oh, say I'm like them—just as fresh and dewy and sweet, and as full of thorns!"

"I never say the things other men say," he answered.

"I should say you don't!"

I mashed down the horn button viciously, and shot ahead of a poky line of cars.

"Let 'er buck!" said Ted.

He crossed his knees and lit a cigarette, leaning over me to get at the electric cigar lighter.

"It's heavenly out here to-day," I said, looking at the vividly flowering hillsides.

"Let's go to dinner somewhere in the country," said he. "Phone home. We'll find one of those chicken dinner places, with vines and collie dogs and all that."

So we did. It was a magic, mystic, moon-soft night, and we talked the universe over again on the way home, as we always did on long drives. I was too drowsily comfortable to do anything but loll, so he drove and I dimmed the lights for him.

"You're great to talk to, Marna!" sighed Ted contentedly, lighting another cigarette from the stub.

"To talk to—yes!" I thought bitterly.

Men do not marry women for their conversation. Still, our discussions really were good fun. For once I got a man's point of view on this man-and-woman business, while Ted, somewhat to his surprise, found

out how girls feel about some things. It was all very impersonal—men and women as a whole, and their problems, looked at from the outside.

Ted was talking of his particular hate this evening—the modern, man chasing girl.

"It's as much as a fellow's life is worth to give a girl a box of chocolates nowadays," he grumbled; "and if you take her to a *matinée*, she begins embroidering guest towels. All the men I know say the same."

"Still, you can't always blame the girl," I objected. "A friend who takes her out is keeping her from other possibilities. Has a man a right to take up all her time?"

"She doesn't need to give it," Ted shot back.

"But she keeps thinking that perhaps, after all, he does care," I said carelessly.

"If she wants to take that chance, it's her own affair. She shouldn't blame any one else."

"In the meantime her youth is going. She is giving the best time of her life to him—her mating time. He is keeping others away."

I couldn't help my voice trembling.

"She has only to tell him so, and he won't stand in the way," answered Ted logically.

"But she likes him best," I objected.

"Well, then—" said Ted.

"But at the same time—" I interrupted.

"What?" he asked.

Then I plunged.

"Well, I don't think much of the man who shies at marriage—who will accept a girl's self-sacrifice and take her time—but who pats himself on the back for his honesty and frankness in assuring her once a week that he never intends to marry."

I spoke hotly, passionately.

"Well, the girl doesn't need to go around with him," said Ted, just as hotly.

"But suppose she loves him?"

I threw my head back and said it with all my might.

All the rules say that if you want a proposal, you must be careful not to frighten the man off. You must pretend that you don't care. Oh, I know it's sound advice; but I had got past being cautious. I was too excited and hurt and angry with myself to be wary. I was angry with myself for caring for some one who didn't care for me, scornful of myself for falling in love before I was asked to.

I would have said more, worse things still, except that a crazily driven car slashed into the moonlight ahead of us on a curve, crowding so far over to our side that Ted had to swerve up on the bank to escape it, and we almost tipped over. The car righted itself, but in the confusion we forgot our conversation for the moment, and, when we remembered, we both wisely kept the talk confined to trivial things.

But I saw that I had gone too far—worse, that I'd tossed the dice and lost.

III

THE next day Nyla came to see me, full of suppressed excitement.

"What is it?" I asked, as soon as we had kissed each other and she had lighted her cigarette.

"Nothing," said she, so I knew it was something important; but she did not tell me what. Instead, she switched the conversation to my own affairs. "How are you and Teddy getting on?" she asked.

"Oh, Nyla!" Wretched, I told her all about our talk of the evening before. "He doesn't care—that's all," I went on. "If I said what I did, and he didn't make the obvious counterattack, he means never to. He doesn't love me, of course—I've always known that. Why have I wasted so much time on him? If he doesn't care now, he never will."

"Looks that way," she admitted.

"It's good to know that some one cares, anyway," I went on. "Roderick would never have said such humiliating things to me. He appreciates me as Ted doesn't."

"It isn't exactly that Ted doesn't, Marna. It's only that annoying platonic friendship idea of his. Why on earth should people try to prove that platonic friendship is possible between a man and a woman? What if it is? Who wants such a thing, anyway?"

"All men do," said I.

"But no woman does," Nyla returned decidedly.

"That is just what Ted has against us. He says the trouble with women is that what they want is a home." I looked at her lugubriously. "He makes it sound a crime," I told her.

"It is, to him," she said.

"I know it," I answered feelingly.

"Well, let him get some one else for a platonic friend, Marna. You've served your time, I'll say."

"It was lovely at first," I remembered.

"But it makes you more unhappy than happy now. You want either something more or nothing."

"Yes," I whispered, looking away from her.

"You didn't sleep last night," she accused me.

"No."

"Cut it out! Ted isn't worth it. No man's worth a mature, unmarried woman spending her time over, except one whose actions say 'Object, matrimony.'"

"Oh, I don't especially want matrimony—"

"You're no good if you don't," said Nyla brusquely. "No woman is."

"Oh, well—"

"Cut him out, Marna! That's what I came over to say."

"Something's up. Why the excitement?" I pleaded, but she could not be cajoled.

IV

THE last time Roderick Bollman had spoken to me about Ted and myself, I had explained to him:

"We're only friends—best friends. We'll never be anything more."

"When you're through with him, call me up," said Roderick. "The house and the radio and the dog and I will be waiting for you."

And it had been left at that.

I had not seen Roderick since, though he had sent me flowers—violets and Cecil Bruner roses, and once a homy-looking growing plant that hurt my conscience every time I looked at it. Roderick was so good!

"How do you know he is?" Nyla had asked, when I said as much to her.

She had seemed to distrust him then, but now, for some reason that I could not fathom, she had suddenly faced about and become his enthusiastic champion.

It was she who brought us together, and left us together, the evening that we settled things. I told him that if he still cared in that way, and wanted me as I was, without the feeling that I ought to have for him, I wouldn't say no any longer. He was so happy that an echo of his contentment seemed to make me almost happy, too, except for the moments when I thought of Ted; so I tried not to think of him. It was easier, because he was obliged to be

out of town on business for a week or two just then.

I dreaded breaking this news to Ted; but after all, I asked myself, what was it to him? Why should I care how he felt? He hadn't cared how I felt.

When he returned home, he phoned to me, and asked if I had a dinner engagement. I had not, and we went to a noisy Italian restaurant that we had always liked.

We talked, as usual, about life's puzzling relationships and about ourselves.

"I guess, after all, I'd rather have love than friendship. There's more kick in it," I told him idly.

"Yes? Nyla says you're thinking of—"

"Yes, I am," I admitted, and was relieved to find how easy it was to tell him.

"Well, Roderick is a fine chap. I know he'll be good to you," said Teddy. If his phrase was trite, neither of us felt it. "Of course, you and I will always be friends just the same," he added.

"Just the same," I said, knowing we never would.

Everything or nothing, Nyla had said, and that was what I had wanted with Ted. It is what every woman of marriageable age wants with a man; but Ted and his complacent brothers—it wasn't everything or nothing that they wanted, but everything for nothing. My heart beat with resentment.

Well, I was glad I was out of it. I was going to a man who wasn't too cautious to say:

"I love you. I want you for my wife."

Roderick was not afraid of the marriage trap. He wanted a home. I was glad when the evening with Ted was over.

It seemed no time at all until my wedding day. Nyla Lewis was to be bridesmaid. At the last, I was so confused and excited and hurried that I did not know what I thought or felt. I had forgotten Ted—until the very moment in front of the altar, when my lips parted to say:

"I will."

I looked up, to say it firmly. It was then that I saw Ted in the nearest pew.

That terrible moment! Ted and I looked squarely into each other's eyes, and I saw that in that instant he knew—now, when it was too late, he knew finally and forever that I was his woman, that he, and no one else, was my man. Too late!

What he had side-stepped—marriage—was the one thing now he would have given

his soul to have. I read his thoughts in his eyes. Nyla saw, too.

I knew his agony, but what could I do now? The service had halted. Every one, everything, waited for my answer.

"I will," I answered, knowing that by those two little words I cut myself off forever from the man whom I loved, and who loved me.

Why couldn't he have known sooner? No, that was impossible. It had taken this shock to make him know. If we had gone on as we had been doing, he would never have known in a lifetime. It was not until law and religion had placed me beyond his reach forever that he realized that he wanted me and wanted nothing else in life.

I felt like a statue of stone. I was dead. This was death; and there would be years of it!

Then Nyla did a strange thing. She lifted her huge bridesmaid's bouquet high above her head. It was a great flaming mass of red roses. It could be seen from the back of the church. It seemed like a signal.

It was a signal, for back there in the crush some one had obeyed it. A woman came forward, saying something to the people—something that made them part to let her through.

"Yes—his wife," Nyla whispered to me, her voice shaking.

"Those things only happen in novels," I thought to myself, wildly, hysterically.

The place was hushed. She came nearer us. Nothing was said aloud.

"I'm his wife!" she said in a low, husky tone.

The clergyman looked at Roderick Bollman. I don't remember much after that. Soon we were home, and Nyla's arm was about me, and she was telling me things.

"Dope! She did it before he left her, and, when he quit, she just went all the way down. He'd heard she was dead; but he didn't make sure—didn't want to, after he met you, I guess."

I don't remember everything. Presently I was lying on the couch in the old sitting room at home. A ring at the door—Ted! He stumbled in, fell to his knees before the couch, and laid his head on my lap.

"Oh, Marna!"

Nyla rose to go.

"Fate—the ways of chance," Ted was saying, and then: "Darling, darling!"

"After all, trapped by a woman!" murmured Nyla.

Teddy's face was buried in my hands, and he did not hear. He would not have heard if we had shouted. I looked over his curly blond head to Nyla.

"What—" I whispered.

"Didn't I tell you there must be some way to make him realize he cared, and that if I could find it, I would work it?"

"But—"

I was bewildered, groping.

"Well, it's easy to hire detectives if you have pocket money," Nyla said. When she got to the door, she turned and added: "Who was it advised you to marry Roderick Bollman?"

After she had gone, Teddy stirred and looked up into my face.

"Chance—just chance, Marna!" he marveled, his voice full of wonder and awe.

"Yes—chance, Teddy," I answered.

GOLDEN NELL

SAY yes! Your glamour is to me
The goldenglow's, with butterflies,
Exquisite as the June-kissed sea,
Pretending they are frowning eyes.

Not the denial in your glance,
But what it leaves unspoken, stirs
To life again the dead romance
Which flourished when your name was hers.

There may be nothing in a name—
One that is overgilt may cloy;
But yours, though masked, is still the frame
You smiled from as we fled to Troy!

Richard Butler Glaenser

The Lost Range

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—THE STORY OF A DESPERATE
FIGHT FOR A HIDDEN EMPIRE IN A REMOTE
CORNER OF THE WEST

By Eleanor Gates

Author of "Skeleton Island," "The Jungle Girl," etc.

"YOU'RE on the wrong trail, young feller!"

"No—I'm bound up to Steve Black's cattle camp."

The two men, both mounted, were facing each other at a sharp turn of the steep, narrow mountain grade. To the summit side of them showed the bare dirt and rock of the cut, its perpendicular wall a lively blend of the bright red of the soil and the sand-color of the stone. It still bore everywhere the grooved marks of the road maker's pick.

On the other side a precipice dropped straight to where the river forced its way through a bowlder-choked pass, with deep, protesting roars at its confinement, and far glimpses of angry, flying white.

"My name's Sidmore," announced the first speaker, a challenge in the milky-blue eyes that studied the rider headed up the mountain. "I belong at Black's, and I can tell you there ain't no cattle up in this direction."

At that the second man burst into a good-natured laugh.

"I thought you'd say something like that," he returned. "Black sent you down along the road to stop me, didn't he, when he got the phone"—a backward toss of his wide hat indicated the single wire which, poorly strung, sagged above them, close to the face of the cut—"that a man named Lockhart was started up this way?"

Lockhart looked to be under thirty, and had the length and leanness of the typical Westerner. He was not, however, dressed in typical Western riding fashion, nor was he wearing the *chaparajos*, leg-long and

hairy, that distinguished Sidmore as a cattleman. He had on a gray sombrero, but his heavy high boots were laced up to his knees, and his well worn breeches were cut full like a cavalryman's, and made of corduroy.

To give himself time before speaking further, Sidmore dismounted, with much clinking of a pair of huge Spanish spurs and a brisk rattling of his spur chains. On his right thigh, against the fur of his "chaps," hung his holstered automatic, the curve of its blue-green handle glinting in the noonday sun. He pulled a bag of tobacco from a shirt pocket under his flapping vest, dripped a small portion of its contents upon a rectangle of thin paper, rolled himself a cigarette with proper swiftness and dexterity, and lighted for his smoke.

He was not so tall as Lockhart, nor so slender, and his stocky shoulders had the stoop which comes of years of day-long riding. The hair showing below his felt sombrero was a fiery red that toned well with the freckles plentifully spotting his leathery, clean-shaven face. His brows were red, too; but his eyelashes were white, and, contrasted with his sun-cured skin, they gave him a curiously malign expression, which was heightened by his loose-hanging under lip.

Lockhart did not dismount. He swung the strawberry roan that he was riding across the road, to make the halt easier for his horse's back, and then leaned forward on the pommel. The face he turned toward Sidmore was well cut, the nose straight, the chin square, and the mouth

firm and strong. His brown hair was cropped short below the sweatband. His shaven skin seemed to be flushed, rather than tanned. His eyes were dark gray, with ample space between them, and just now they had an amused look.

"I know there isn't any range in this corner of the State," he said with quiet irony, and with a trace of a drawl. "Up this way the land that's level enough to be plowed and planted is all in ranches, isn't it?"

"It sure is," agreed Sidmore, but his look was averted.

"Of course, now we're speaking officially," Lockhart went on. "We're talking according to the records in the nearest land office."

He gave another jerk of the big hat, sideways, toward the flat wall of the grade.

"I don't know nothin' about any records," observed Sidmore dryly; "but it must be like you say."

"I haven't set eyes on the records," added the younger man. "What's more, they don't interest me. What I care about is plain fact; and the fact is that while officially there isn't any range up here among these mountains, there actually *is* range, and there are herds on it. When the stock comes down to the railroad corrals, to be shipped to market, the hoofs of cattle wear down the road that's under us this very minute!"

Sidmore had listened patiently. He shifted his weight.

"You couldn't be worse off the track, young feller," he returned indifferently, "if you was to try. Who ever told you such a loony yarn?"

"Let's not waste our time and our breath in talking foolishness," said Lockhart, with more than a trace of sudden impatience and resentment in his tone. "Let's get down to brass tacks. I know that visitors don't get fed on one of Black's fattened calves when they show up at his camp, and I know why."

The man in the *chaparajos* did not reply to that.

"I think maybe, if you was to tell me what you're up this way for," he suggested, "I could save you the trouble of makin' the balance of the grade."

"I'll tell you," answered Lockhart pleasantly; "but you'll see straight off that I'll have to go ahead. About fifteen years ago a friend of my father's, named Rolfe Pome-

roy, came up into this end of the county to live on a claim he'd filed, and he brought his wife and one youngster with him. Since then my folks haven't heard a word about Pomeroy or his family, and I've been sent in to see if I can locate 'em."

By a forward swing of a leather-cuffed hand, from the wrist of which dangled a braided quirt, Sidmore tossed the stub of his cigarette out into the stirring air above the noisy river, his gesture that of one who has definitely abandoned a certain line of conduct for another line.

"As you just said," he began, "there ain't no sense in you and me wastin' time and wind. We might as well lay our cards on the table. I know all about Pomeroy. Also, I can give you the other side of the business. Young feller, the five mountain meadows up back of our camp ain't been free grazin' for the past twenty-five years. Nope—they been Steve Black's grazin', claims or no claims; and settlers had just better keep out, if they don't want to be turned into ghosts!"

"That's frank enough," Lockhart conceded; "but I'm not trying to settle any ranch or grass rights. That's work for a court, and—"

Sidmore interrupted with a scornful laugh.

"Maybe it's work for Heald, the new sheriff of the county," he observed. "Well, pardner, we hear he's some fancy breed, this Heald. He wears a dicer of a Sunday, and fusses with his finger nails."

"I gather that you don't think much of Heald up here."

"You gather proper," assented Sidmore. "Honest to goodness, just thinkin' about him gives me an ache! Up here, Black's the whole shootin' match. We don't give a snap of the fingers who's elected sheriff. Money fixes a heap of things, young feller, and Steve's the boy who's got the spondulix. If Heald don't want to take a handful of Steve's cash—"

The cattleman spread his hands, shrugged, and spat.

"I've got a letter from Heald in my pocket now," went on Lockhart, tapping the breast of his brown shirt. "He tells me that twelve ranchers who tried to settle in this section have been shot down—some at their front doors, and the rest have been found dead in the timber, or out in the high meadows."

Sidmore nodded.

"I reckon twelve's a straight count," he declared. "Yep—it's averaged just about one rancher every fifteen months, these last fifteen years. A farmer sure makes Steve Black lay back his ears!" He chuckled. "He's got what you might call a private graveyard."

Sidmore chuckled again. Lockhart waited for a moment.

"Any women and children in it?" he inquired carelessly.

A slow red darkened the deep tan of Sidmore's face, but he held back an angry retort.

"A woman or two has died up yonder," he admitted presently, "and maybe a kid or so; but Steve Black don't fight widows and kids. Us men help 'em to go down this trail, and nobody tells 'em they have to keep their mouths shut."

"I know it's done out in the open, the whole rotten business," Lockhart said quietly; "and certain men of the county have connived at it. I guess, though, that Heald, even if he doesn't like the situation, won't be such a blamed fool as to come in here with his deputies."

"A posse," continued Sidmore, grinning, "would have to travel up this grade two abreast, and—"

"And they could be picked off as easy as shooting fish," added Lockhart.

"It 'd be a reg'lar massacre," admitted Sidmore. "Why, young feller, I doubt if Uncle Sam could put Steve Black out. One time there was a plan to keep Steve's cattle in. Well, that didn't work, neither, for the reason that when the cattle struck the down grade they wasn't Steve's no more, but belonged to some man that didn't know a word about this row up here."

"Heald wrote me," continued Lockhart, "that the officers of the county couldn't give me any protection if I insisted on coming this way. I'd have to run my own risk and take what was handed me. Well, on the other hand, that gives a man a pretty free hand, doesn't it?"

"How do you mean?" The question was drawled in a covert imitation of Lockhart's own manner of speaking.

"Oh, I don't know," parried the younger man. "I was just thinking that it's a poor rule that won't work two ways. If they can't be responsible for *my* safety—"

"Yes, yes," put in the cattleman. "I think I ketch your meanin'. You mean it's dog eat dog?"

"I don't believe I'm going to have any trouble with Mr. Black," Lockhart returned. "Also, I'm going to see Rolfe Pomeroy and his family, if any of them are left alive."

Once more Sidmore waited for a moment before speaking.

"Guess Pomeroy's alive, all right. I ain't talked with nobody that's saw him, you understand; but just so often somebody that ain't a bear helps hisself to a steer out of the meadows—and that's a lot oftener than Steve Black likes, too!"

"I can understand that Mr. Black wouldn't approve of theft," remarked Lockhart humorously. "I suppose Pomeroy's got quite a family by now, and needs more or less beef."

"That's what we hear at the camp," answered Sidmore. "Nobody seems to know where he keeps 'em all. Some of our boys have tried to hunt out his diggin's, but couldn't manage to locate 'em. I've heard tell, though, that Pomeroy goes roamin' through the timber like a grizzly, with long hair and a long beard, and nothin' much on him but deerskins. They say his wife follers after him with a whole brood of kids, most of 'em girls."

Lockhart stared.

"Most of them *girls*!" he exclaimed. "That strikes me as mighty raw—a woman and children being kept in like that, and hounded, and threatened. They haven't done anything to deserve such treatment. It's vile!"

"Nobody told 'em to come, and nobody's askin' 'em to stay," argued Sidmore. "They ain't so different from the rattlesnakes we kill, when you know the truth. Yours sincerely"—he tapped his chest—"wouldn't care to go snoopin' around where Pomeroy puts up. One of our boys got a mite too far in, some years back, and never showed up again. That was before my time; but about three years ago the same thing happened to a Chink that went through prospectin' for gold. Maybe Pomeroy's run out of cartridges, but he manages to slaughter anyhow—beef and men."

"How can he do any ranching?" Lockhart asked. "Wouldn't he be shot down like all the others?"

"Nobody knows just what he's doin'," Sidmore replied. "Strikes me as awful funny that he wants to stay, all alone—no market, no stores, no school, nothin'. May-

be he's found level ground further in, though—ground that ain't connected with Black's string of meadows. So long as he stays where he is, and we stick close to where the cattle feed, why, everybody's general health keeps good."

Lockhart leaned forward in his saddle to peer past his horse's head and over the edge of the cliff.

"That's the river that drains Five Meadows?" he said questioningly.

"She goes plungin' like a horse herd," answered Sidmore admiringly.

The younger man straightened in his saddle.

"At the upper end of it I'll find Pomeroy," he declared, almost as if to himself. "Well"—pressing his knees against his saddle leathers, and turning his riding animal up the grade—"I'll be moseying."

Sidmore whirled as the strawberry roan shoved past his own mount on that narrow shelf; but Lockhart, though he caught the movement out of the tail of an eye, did not so much as turn his head.

"Coming?" called back the latter.

For half a minute Sidmore stood where he was, staring after the stranger, astonished at the boldness of the younger man, and irresolute. It was evident that fear would not hold Lockhart back, but it was not yet time to use the argument of a gun.

"I'll be blasted!" he muttered.

When Lockhart was a few rods away, Sidmore swung a leg across his horse and sent the animal cantering uphill after the red roan. As he went, he continued to curse, but under his breath. However, when he was riding at Lockhart's stirrup, once more he began to reason affably.

"Course, you know you won't git further'n the camp," he observed.

"What's the reason won't?"

"Black's the reason."

"What Black thinks doesn't split any shingles with me."

The keen, eager boldness in Lockhart's look made the milky-blue eyes turn aside.

"You're on Steve Black's land right now," Sidmore pointed out. "That means you're trespassin'."

"I'm on land that Black says is his, but it isn't his," Lockhart answered firmly.

"Also, this is a public road."

"There's been a full dozen settlers that have talked like you're talkin'," reminded the cattleman; "but where are they this minute?"

"I'm not in here to settle"—Lockhart's voice was careless—"but if I were, Sidmore, I can tell you one thing—it would take more than Black and his gang of killers to stam pede me."

Another rush of red dyed Sidmore's throat and face above the soft turn-over collar of his black sateen shirt.

"Oh, well," he replied, with a quick tightening of that loose-hanging under lip, "if *that's* how you feel about it—"

"That's exactly how."

"All right, young feller! It ain't *my* funeral."

II

For a time, as the two men slowly climbed, riding side by side, the mind of each was busy with the problems of their respective situations, and they spoke but seldom.

The sulkiness which Sidmore felt at first soon wore away. He had failed to carry out his orders to head off a young and apparently unarmed rider who had left Great Valley some days before. This meant that his work was still before him—after he had endured the inevitable chaffing of the ropers and fighters of the Black outfit. What he had not dared do under a full sun on the grades would have to be done later—in the depths of the timber on the farther side of the big ridge.

Lockhart, knowing that he was safe for the present, let his thoughts wander. He recalled the picture of Steve Black that had been given him—a lubberly, rawboned man, spraddling, lantern-jawed, and tobacco-chewing, with a squint in his left eye and a long mustache curtaining his cruel mouth.

Next he tried to imagine what Rolfe Pomeroy would look like—by now; and he wondered how the long-lost ranchman's wife and children lived, and dressed, and what they ate.

"What a life for a mother and her girls!" he said to himself. "In fifteen years or so, shut away from civilization, a family can get to a mighty pitiful pass."

Above the two men, or close at hand among the trees, went that one telephone wire. Now and again, in a baked patch of roadway, the tracks of small automobile tires were plainly visible. Sidmore noticed that the stranger remarked the patterns left by the wheels.

"Our toot surrey fetches up the mail,

and what the camp needs," he explained. "It's a handy contraption, but it sure smells worse'n a Digger Injun!"

"What do you do when you need a doctor?" Lockhart inquired.

"Well, we don't fetch the medicine man in," replied Sidmore, grinning. "Nope—we take the sick feller down the grade. If it kills him to ride so far, why, that's his lookout."

"I should think it would take more than a flivver to bring up all the stuff that Black's bunch needs," observed the younger man significantly.

Sidmore guffawed, understanding.

"We used to have our own thirst parlor," he admitted, "and the gasoline buggy always brought our lick up; but since prohibition happened, our boys make their own poison."

"And the Federal agents aren't interested," concluded the stranger.

Sidmore laughed.

"This bit of scenery"—he waved a hand—"is an awful long ways, young feller, from the guys that round up nose paint!"

Their way wound up and up, sometimes leaving the grade behind them to trail snakily across high hogbacks to still another grade. The sun dropped lower and lower on their left, until, a burning, orange-red disk, it rested upon the feathery edge of some distant mountain spur.

Suddenly, then, the air of the ridges grew chill, so that both riders undid the thongs of their saddles that tied in their coats; but they still traveled leisurely, with their bridle reins loose and their horses' heads lowered.

"You don't call this a summer evening, do you?" asked Lockhart.

"Up this far," Sidmore answered, "it's still spring. Lookee!"

He pointed down to where, among fallen cones and a carpet of pine needles, small white and purple flowers showed—the wild violets that had followed the melting snow.

There was no undergrowth where they wound along, but each pine and fir stood in its own clear circle, its trunk straight and dark, with no limbs low enough to touch a horseman's hat. As the day ended in an early gloom, and the clustered trees began to blend into a black hedge that all but shut out the sky, the two riders left the picking of the way to Sidmore's mount,

which hastened its walk as it neared the home corrals, keeping half a neck ahead of the strawberry roan.

Then, out of the darkness ahead, there sounded the clear *rink-a-tink-a-tink* of a banjo, accompanied by a steady pound of feet. A horse whinnied, and a dog barked. Lights came and went like fireflies among the trees as Lockhart and Sidmore veered this way and that, and the trunks of the timber now disclosed, now hid, the lighted doors and windows of the camp.

Soon the stake-and-rider fence of a big corral blocked their way. They swung down and off-saddled without speaking, Lockhart took his poncho-wound blanket roll under an arm, and they made for the square-fronted shack that was the chuck house.

"You'll find the boss over in that big buildin' after supper," Sidmore observed, as they went along.

"I shan't trouble him to-night," declared the stranger.

Lockhart did not even seek out Black in the morning, when, after a meal of beef and potatoes, and ten hours' sleep in a bunk next to Sidmore's, he claimed his roan out of a corral full of nimble, wise-eyed Western horses with scarred backs and dark stripes running from mane to tail—stripes which testified to descent from Arabian stock turned loose, many centuries before, on the Isthmus of Panama by De Soto and Cortez.

Sidmore joined the younger man at a watering trough, where a pipe delivered ice-cold water from a distant spring.

"Ain't you goin' to eat breakfast?" he demanded good-naturedly.

"Not until I've had a ride," Lockhart answered.

"Well, don't start for the Big Five without seein' the boss," Sidmore counseled.

"If he wants to see me, he knows where he can find me," was the reply.

Before Lockhart had his blanket in place, Sidmore had hastily saddled.

"If you're bound to go on," he explained, "why, bein' as I'm headed for the meadows myself, I might as well show you the trail."

"Suit yourself," said Lockhart pleasantly. "I'm fond of company."

The buildings of the camp made a single short street. As the two men turned into it, Lockhart noticed that, instead of the black sateen shirt of the previous day, Sid-

more was reveling in a garment of striking effects, its pattern made up of alternating black and white squares that might easily have done duty as a checkerboard. The squares were so large that they would give a spotted effect at a long distance, and thus identify Sidmore. Lockhart smiled to himself over the change, thoroughly understanding it.

A moment later, when they were halfway along the street, he heard himself hailed, and suddenly reined. Steve Black was seated on the narrow front porch of his house, his big-boned body lurched forward in an armchair. Under a bush of tousled hair, his long face, with its Roman nose and heavy mustache, was like the face of a horse.

Lockhart, looking into eyes that resembled a rodent's, knew the man instantly, recognizing his broken nose, which was famous for the fact that before it came to a heavy end it went hither and yon down the long countenance; recognizing, also, a right hand that was minus its forefinger.

Those men of the camp who were near enough to Black and the stranger either to see the meeting, or to hear the conversation, now halted in their tracks and waited breathlessly.

Lockhart's straight gaze was calm and defiant.

"Did you speak to me, Mr. Black?" he inquired, studying the shock of badly cut hair and the seamed, leather-brown face and throat, which were like pliant bark.

"That's what," Black answered. "I said, wouldn't you like to step down and have a smoke and a nip of whisky?"

"Thanks!" Lockhart shook his head. "I think I'll be getting on. I'm started late as it is."

The strawberry roan moved forward.

"Sa-a-a-ay!" Black's tone was one of injured surprise. "You're in a thunderin' rush, seems to me! Wait a minute! Wait!" Then, as Lockhart again came short: "You seem to be takin' the Big Five Trail."

"Yes," said the younger man. "If it's any of your business, I don't mind telling you what you know already—I'm on my way to locate Rolfe Pomeroy."

"So-o-o-o!" The small eyes smiled mockingly. "Well, you ain't goin' to find no Pomeroy, my boy. You'll just have a hard ride for nothin'."

"I like riding."

"You seem to eat it up," Black rejoined, shaking with silent laughter; "but you don't seem trained to firearms," he added, noting the absence of any holster.

"I get along with people."

The cattle owner laughed again, showing dark teeth with many gaps; but he sobered suddenly as Lockhart seemed about to ride forward once more.

"Just the same," he declared, "you're doin' a fool thing to foller in after Pomeroy. You're takin' chances."

"I know it. I don't mind."

"You'll git a full meal of 'em this time. Before you go, you better leave your last will and so forth with the boys here."

Black was grinning again. Lockhart turned his horse at right angles and rode up to within five feet of the armchair.

"Why don't you say what's on your chest?" he demanded quietly.

Black got to his feet. A new look came into the little eyes, and the wrinkled face blazed.

"All right!" he replied crisply. "All right! That's what I'll do. I'll say this, sonny—you better take my advice, which is to turn around and take your bronc back to his home stall!"

"Are you through?" asked Lockhart.

"No-o-o!" Black shouted it, and his big figure trembled. "I ain't through. Understand me, and I mean every word I say—this camp don't do no truckin' with Pomeroy!"

"I am not the camp."

"You bet your sweet life you ain't! Got it right *that* whack, my son! But I'm runnin' this end of the county, and I don't let no stranger rove it like it pleases him."

"Just how does it happen that you run this end of the county? Not more than five sections of it belong to you."

Instead of replying, Black bent and struck the bowl of his pipe against the edge of the porch. When he straightened, he gave Lockhart a flash of hate.

"Don't take the trail against my orders," he advised.

Lockhart backed his horse and headed out into the street once more.

"I am not in your employ, Mr. Black," he retorted; "and I've got to find that one settler who hasn't been murdered yet." Then, with a wave of the hand: "So long!"

Sidmore was beside him again.

"So long, boss," he called to Black. "I'll be back in two days, I reckon."

Lockhart did not glance around as Black answered, but he caught the covert meaning in the cattleman's last words:

"There's a calf down yonder, Sid, that 'll need a blab on his nose."

"Yes, sir—I'll see to it."

Without more words, the camp was left behind, the horsemen following a wide trail up which the cattle were brought from their pastures. Upon that trail, thickly covered with pine needles, an iridescent film of dew still lay—except where, as Lockhart noted, the film had been broken by the shod hoofs of a horse which had gone out ahead of them, probably not more than an hour before.

For a mile or more the track kept to the summit of the ridge, now rising, now dipping, and swerving only to avoid trees. It was so wide that the two still rode nose and nose, while the sun mounted and the chill went from the air.

"How do you grub," inquired Lockhart, "when you go out like this for a couple of days?"

Sidmore all but started, and for a moment held his breath, unable to supply an answer to a question that he had not anticipated, and realizing that it touched a weak spot in Black's plan. The moment past, however, he was wagging his red head carelessly.

"It's a blamed nuisance to carry stuff along," he declared. "Mostly I take in my belt. Sometimes, though, I wing a bird or a rabbit, and roast it; and I have my tobacco." Then, as an afterthought: "How do *you* plan to eat?"

Lockhart laughed.

"I don't. I'm like you—I don't like to load up my saddle with cans and so on. I fetch along a few slabs of chocolate, and count on pine nuts."

"A man always ought to have a couple of pounds of jerked beef," supplemented Sidmore, now feeling himself on better ground. "Somehow, though, us fellers don't never trouble to hang any beef—the yellor jackets is so bad."

The hoofprints of the horseman who had preceded them were no longer visible, with the going of the dew film; but not yet was Lockhart anxious as to his safety, feeling certain that the attack upon him would be staged farther away from Steve Black's than this, and that the unknown rider would probably keep ahead of them as far as the first great level of the five.

Soon they were looking down upon an acreage of flat range, the existence of which, as Sidmore had pointed out, was denied by the records of the land office. It lay so far below that its blue-green was misty through distance, its scattered trees were only dark dots, and the twisting river that cut it almost into halves was like a bit of white silk thread.

Upon it, here and there, went moving specks which were lighter than the trees—these Black's feeding cattle. As Lockhart drew rein to take his first view of the mountain meadow, Sidmore pointed out the animals.

"They ain't graded stock," he informed his companion. "Nope—just good beef."

"That land must be rich," observed the younger man. "Silt from the cañons farther up. I don't wonder men will take their lives in their hands to settle it!"

"They're fools," argued the other. "The trail we've got to take is so steep in some spots that we'll have to git down and hoof it behind our broncs. Naturally, if you're comin' the opposite direction, you have to hang on to the steerin' gear of your nag. It 'd take thousands of dollars to put a road in, wouldn't it?"

"How much land is there in all the Five Meadows?" Lockhart asked.

"Shucks! I don't know. Maybe a hundred thousand acres—maybe only half that. I'm a fair judge of beef, but I don't know much about land."

"A hundred thousand acres of grass isn't to be sneezed at," Lockhart returned. "Those meadows must be gold mines—mines that work themselves, you might say."

"That's what they do. Black didn't even have to wire up his range. God A'mighty done it for him, by makin' the mountains so steep that a cow won't climb 'em. We give the stock salt, and we keep an eye on the herds at calvin' time. Once a year we go in and tap the meadows. Wheat, you see, if it was raised down yonder, would have to be packed out on mule back—"

"Oh, I don't know," Lockhart interrupted. "What's the matter with hauling it up a chute? They do things so-fashion in Italy. Anything could be pulled up that way—butter, eggs, even—anything."

"It 'll never be used for ranches," Sidmore went on, "as long as Steve Black's alive; and his beef takes itself to market."

"Perhaps," returned Lockhart; "but you never can tell what 'll happen, these days. You know, the Federal Government might possibly send a bombing plane up this way some day, and collect on Black's home-brew."

Sidmore opened his milky-blue eyes.

"That's a cinch!" he exclaimed. "It could be did! By thunder, it could! A man couldn't ask for a better place to light his machine than the flats down yonder."

He nodded his big hat at the distant cattle-dotted meadow.

Lockhart had accomplished what he desired—the diversion of Sidmore's mind from the job that Black's henchman had been sent out to do. Speaking low and quietly, and making no quick move, he gave a single command:

"Lift your hands."

The small automatic in his left hand enforced the command. Instantly Sidmore's arms began to slide up, one going more rapidly than the other—this because, for a second, the cattleman was tempted to seize his own weapon; but Lockhart's look warned him. Both hands were raised above his sombrero, and his blue eyes stood out apprehensively.

"Steve Black doesn't even trouble to brand, does he?" inquired Lockhart, half humorously carrying on the conversation which had so adroitly tricked the other off his guard.

"Reckon you understand this situation," was Sidmore's reply; "but look out with that baby gat you got, young feller! I don't want to git bored, even with a pill."

"Make no quick moves," cautioned Lockhart. "Do exactly what I tell you to do—no more, no less."

With a sudden forward bend he had Sidmore's automatic.

"It was a dirty job," admitted the cattleman. "I didn't hanker for it."

"I know you wouldn't like to hurt me," Lockhart answered. "On the other hand, you talked pretty freely to me yesterday, and I knew then that it didn't matter how much you said, for the simple reason that I was never to get away alive."

Sidmore was scowling.

"Say! Use my pistol, will you? Darned if I don't hate to git held up by a tony peashooter like you got!"

Lockhart's reply was to thrust the larger weapon into the front of his shirt.

"Your gun's no good," he explained. "You see, last night, while you were snoring, I unloaded it."

Reaching his free hand into a hip pocket, he took from it a pair of light steel manacles, each handcuff of which had been left open. With a second quick move, and with the barrel of the little pistol held against a black check of Sidmore's shirt, Lockhart placed the shackles behind the other man's pommel.

"Get into them," he said, drawing aside a few feet.

Sidmore obeyed. He showed signs of panic now, for beads of sweat were standing out upon his tanned face.

"My land!" he breathed. "The idea that I didn't guess who you was! Well, the laugh's on them, too—neither did they guess it. What do you want me to do now, sheriff?"

"So you really know me!" replied the other. "Good! I'll trouble you to tell me where your knife is."

Sidmore's ironed hands felt for the knife under the front of his vest, and brought it halfway out of its sheath.

"All the weapons I got—the pistol and this blade," he declared. "What do I do next?"

At that the sheriff laughed.

"You're an accommodating chap," he admitted; "but I might own a pair of cuffs and not be the sheriff."

"It ain't the irons," Sidmore protested. "It's the way you go at your job."

"Thanks! Now I'm going to cut you out of that loud shirt of yours, which was intended to show who wasn't to be shot, and—"

Sidmore's pale eyes bulged. He raised his shackled hands imploringly.

"If you do that," he begged, "don't take me down the trail! I'll tell you the whole business—honest, I will!"

"We'll change shirts," continued Heald quietly. "Then, if you value your life, you'll be careful how you show me the way to Pomeroy's."

"I'll be careful!" The man's fear was genuine. "But, sheriff, give me credit for one thing—you'd 'a' been shot on the grade yesterday if it hadn't been for me. I was dead against it."

The sheriff smiled.

"If anybody'd fired at me, and aimed for my heart, or lower, instead of my head, you'd have died in your tracks, Sidmore."

I'm not such a fool as to come riding up into this country not only without a posse, but also without a bullet-proof jacket on me."

Sidmore shook his head.

"You've played this awful slick," he vowed. "Let's git out of this trail!"

"We're to be followed?"

"Well, not right away, but somebody'll be along in an hour or so. When they meet up with the man down below, they'll come back and start lookin' to both sides. I think we better go to the right, and cross the river. And—let's not stop to change just yet."

"You lead," was the sheriff's answer. Then, as Sidmore turned his mount out of the trail: "Don't risk trying to get away," Heald added. "You wouldn't make it safe. My roan is fast."

"I ain't riskin' nothin'," was the reply, as the two horses jogged away through the trees. "Christopher Columbus, sheriff, but you've sure got the nerve!"

"How many men did we say had been killed up here in the meadows?" the sheriff inquired.

"A full twelve."

"Keep that number in mind," advised Heald dryly. "You know, Sidmore, thirteen's an unlucky number, and the next blood that wets the range grass isn't going to be mine!"

The cattleman turned a face that was almost as pale as his lashes.

"Gosh, let's hump ourselves!" he pleaded.

III

WHEN thickets of chaparral brought them down from a canter to a walk, Heald halted both horses. Dismounting, he took Sidmore's coiled lariat from where it hung, forward of the saddle, unwound it, and tied one end of it to the handcuffs. Then the older man got down and stood aside, tethered like an animal to a tree.

The sheriff worked quickly. Sidmore's horse was hobbled, then unbridled and unsaddled. There were no hobbles for the red roan, but he was turned loose, nevertheless, since it was likely that he would not leave the other horse. His saddle being off, Heald transferred the blanket roll from the ground to Sidmore's back. Then the two men started away on foot, Sidmore slightly bent under his load, and Heald holding to a loop made in the lariat.

It was when they were deep in the brush of the mountainside that a second stop was made, and Heald changed his brown shirt for the plaid one. He did not risk unlocking the handcuffs from Sidmore's wrists, but slit the black and white garment up both sleeves and under the arms in order to remove it. He gave his own garment the same treatment before dropping it over the cattleman's head.

After that the two continued their way riverward, descending as they went. As mile after mile of mountainside was left behind them, they exchanged a spring temperature for one of midsummer. On Sidmore's brown features streams of perspiration made tiny watercourses through the dust of the dry needles broken by his heavy boots.

Coming behind, the younger and more active sheriff was scarcely less warm. Carefully he kept track of the time, consulting the little, steel-shuttered chronometer on his wrist. At intervals of an hour, though Sidmore repeatedly protested, he insisted on a short rest, during which the two men enjoyed a smoke.

On such occasions the sheriff kept well apart from his companion, emphasizing the fact that he understood the danger that the wearer of the brown shirt was running, should the latter be spied out by some sharpshooter at a distance. As for Sidmore, he was well aware of his situation, and hunched himself out of sight beneath any handy undergrowth; but his manner was unchanged, and his look, though anxious, was far from dark.

"I poured out this drench for myself," he assured Heald more than once. "I ain't kickin' none, sheriff. If I was in your boots, I'd do like you're doin'."

At noon they chanced across their first sight of available water, though all the morning the distant thread that was the river had been gradually widening below them. They stopped at a rivulet which had cut a deep groove down the mountain, waited a while before drinking sparingly, and laid fresh green leaves in the tops of their sombreros. Then they went slipping and sliding on, tired with their unaccustomed labor, and hungry, but determined to put between them and probable pursuers, before the early night closed down, the deep, cold torrent that was still far below.

"We got to make our crossin' as soon as possible," Sidmore had argued. "Al-

most under us is the narrowest point of the river, and it's bridged by cut timber. If we don't git over now, the crossin's sure to be watched later on, when the boys find out that Black's idea has went fluey. As for the cattle bridges further along—well, usin' one of them would be the same as suicide!"

Until midday, whenever Heald looked down, the first meadow had seemed to be completely ringed round by mountains, from under one of which the river appeared to come. He could scarcely believe that, when he was farther to the right, there would be seen the wide opening which gave to the second meadow.

During a brief rest in the early afternoon, with the voice of the water already a loud roar in their ears, the sheriff saw that a cleft showed, far to the northwest, between two of the circling peaks. In the gap, on either side of the swift flood, he was even able to make out a pattern of trails, etched into the green of the pass by the sharp hoofs of cattle.

"We ought to go through there at night," suggested Sidmore. "Fact is, sheriff, we could go on level ground all the way if we was to do night travelin'."

"We're not in a hurry," Heald returned. "Naturally, Black's gang will expect me to make a quick rush up the range. Well, that's just what I don't aim to do. If they track us, they'll have to climb down out of their saddles, and go as light on grub as we'll go."

Sidmore shook a dubious head.

"That looks pretty slim, sheriff. I could eat my boots right this second, if I didn't need 'em so bad for walkin'!"

"Do you want to go free, and hike it back to camp?" asked Heald.

Sidmore thought the suggestion over, his red head lowered above his shackled hands.

"Nope," he decided finally. "I guess I'll stick with you."

"It's going to be a hard trip," reminded the sheriff; "and I'm not going to trust you. Before you're done, you'll probably feel like a dog, and be terrible sore against me. So—"

He waited for a final reply.

"I don't want to knock Steve Black behind his back," explained the elder man, "and I won't. I'd like to git out of this rookus alive, and I know I'm runnin' chances while I'm with you; but I been plumb sick of the whole proposition for some time. Also, you can understand, be-

in' as I've lost my bronc and my gun, how I'd hate to go back and face the boss and the boys!"

"I like your answer," Heald declared. "I put the idea up to you just to see what you'd say. Now I feel certain about one thing, Sidmore—you've never killed in this range row." Then he added quickly, as Sidmore straightened and took a deep breath, as if about to protest; "I'm not asking you who *has* done the killing. You'll not be forced to squeal on anybody."

"Thanks!"

Their spurs had been left behind with the saddles. Now, as the final miles proved even steeper than the first, they were forced to dig in their heels to keep from falling. They clung to roots and branches as they descended toward a great level that was already purpling before the fast advance of night.

However, they were able to make their crossing of the river before darkness set in. They found a rude bridge made of two giant pines, which had been felled so ingeniously that they lay side by side above the black rapids, swelled, at this season, by the first flood from the melting snows. The tumult of the narrow, crowding water made other sounds impossible of hearing.

A trace of dim light still holding, the two men climbed away from the stream and toward the first meadow. Presently they rested, too breathless to speak, and each ate a rectangle of chocolate taken from Heald's blanket roll. Then, with the old moon gone behind the pines of Steve Black's ridge, they got up and went on beside the river, until the sheriff, trudging at the heels of his prisoner, saw that the latter's stocky figure, faintly outlined by the light of the stars, was rocking with weariness under its load.

Veering sharply toward the right, they crossed the range to the base of the farther ridge, and hauled themselves up it for an hour or more. Coming, head on, against a thicket of dogwood, they sought its shelter. Sidmore curled down, and was asleep too soon to know that Heald had bound his boots together at the ankle. Cutting his blanket in two, the sheriff covered his companion, and then went a rod or more away before settling himself down to rest.

He was awakened, toward morning, by the sound of voices. Cautiously sitting up, he saw, through a screen of dogwood, two large hats bob slowly past. No doubt

their wearers were Black's men, making a search of that side of the great meadow.

Heald, with his prisoner's automatic in hand, got to his knees, expecting Sidmore to hail the men; but an hour later, when he stole to where Sidmore was lying, he found the cattleman still asleep.

A horse herd passed them next, led by a small pinto mare with no foal at her side. When the herd had gone on—it seemed to be following the two riders, as if from curiosity—a coyote came on behind, now sniffing the grass where Heald and Sidmore had crossed it, now standing, with his gray head raised, while he scented the air. The lack of fear on the part of the wild dog made Heald feel certain that no other riders were anywhere near.

Before waking his prisoner, he carefully untied the rope binding the latter's ankles. Then he helped Sidmore to his feet.

The cattleman begged to be relieved of his heavy *chaparajos*, and his captor gave him only half of yesterday's load. They then began the next stage of their journey, climbing, at a gradual slant, the mountain-side upon the base of which they had spent the night.

Sidmore found the work difficult, not having the free use of his arms. As the day advanced, both men's clothing grew heavy and dark with perspiration and soil. Already they had lost weight, and their faces, under their day old beards, were noticeably thinner; but they persisted without complaint, for their hollowing eyes made out, whenever they cared to turn them on the great meadow below, more and more horsemen.

"Lookin' for my body," observed Sidmore; "but you can see for yourself how they hate to git down off a saddle!"

When the sun was standing straight above the river, they allowed themselves a stop beside a runlet, and once more had their ration of chocolate. Then they climbed on, Sidmore being cheered with the promise that, once out of sight of the first meadow, and with a shoulder of mountain between them and any watchers stationed on the ridge beyond the river, they were to have a meal of wild game roasted over a night fire.

But it was mid morning of the following day before they stood upright on level ground again. Then they looked at each other and laughed. Their faces were stained so that they looked like different

men. On their jaws, the disguise was further perfected by a heavy stubble. Their clothes were torn, and their uncovered heads—for they were carrying their big hats down their backs on thongs—were wet and matted.

It was the sight of Sidmore's wrists that made the sheriff sober. The steel bracelets, though they were not tight on the cattleman's arms, had worn the skin at each effort of climbing, and there were dark swellings.

"I'll have to take those things off," declared Heald. "Sidmore, I think you'd better turn back."

"For the reason I told you," was the answer, "I just can't, sheriff. I can't let you take the cuffs, neither. If they head us off, it 'll be bad enough for me to face the bunch with my hands tied and my gun gone; but if they was to find me with you, and *not* handcuffed—well, Steve Black would shoot me!"

"And I'd live, if they caught me, how long?"

"If they didn't guess who you was," Sidmore replied, "you'd live a minute, maybe; but if they found out you was Heald, you might live considerable longer—and you'd be sorry you wasn't dead!"

"I understand!" The sheriff smiled. "Well, they'd better be in a pack when they try to take me. When I meet up with them, I'm going to shoot on sight."

Sidmore nodded.

"Why not? It's a cinch it 'll be a kill-in' on one side or the other. Been so from the start, too; only the settlers was usually shot in the back, when they wasn't expectin' trouble, and left to lay where they tumbled on their faces."

Heald murmured under his breath.

"Sure, it's rotten," Sidmore agreed. "That's why I want to git out of it. Pomeroy's alive just because he went further in, on ground that Black can't use. Even so, it just about kills Black to think he ain't killed the feller."

"And why hasn't he gone in after Pomeroy?" asked the sheriff.

"The main reason is that none of our boys like to carry out a job that means a long hike on foot. Black knows that Pomeroy kept along the river when he pushed further north; but the horse don't live that could foller Pomeroy and carry a rider at the same time. It's a trip for Shanks' mare."

They hid, then, to rest, their hiding place a spot on the meadow side of the ridge. Seated together, they looked down on the trailing white and brown dots which were Steve Black's cattle, and on a close, dark mass that was the horse herd, already in the shade of some large oaks on the bottom land.

"I've had it in my mind," said the sheriff, "to take a lot of time about our trip in to find Pomeroy. We could go back on the next ridge, and get along well enough on what I could shoot, and on pine nuts; but as I've thought that plan over, I've come to think less of it."

"Glad of that!"

Heald went on without waiting to hear the reasons for Sidmore's satisfaction.

"Black thought my coming into his end of the county was a big joke," he said. "The second your horse limped in, if he didn't change his mind, anyhow he must have done some tall swearing. He knows now that something has gone wrong. He'll figure how he can head me off—if his men aren't planted right now along that pass you spoke about."

"I'll tell you somethin'," confided Sidmore. "I'm doin' it because I don't hanker to meet up with our gang. It's this, sheriff—for some while back Steve Black's been talkin' of goin' in to drive Pomeroy out. Well, this time, I'll bet my hat he goes. He'll go after Pomeroy, and he'll also go after you!"

Heald stood up.

"Do you think they're ahead of us now?"

Sidmore shook his head.

"I don't; but it 'll happen soon, sure as you're born. They'll leave some of the boys at the camp, because they don't know who's likely to come weavin' up the grade, lookin' for you. The bunch that starts in to corral Pomeroy and you will have pack animals with 'em, to carry grub and so forth; and they'll wait till you've had time to join up with Pomeroy."

"You mean they'll let me join Pomeroy?" said Heald.

The elder man got to his feet.

"Sure, sheriff! Until you do, you're a needle in fifty haystacks, ain't you?" He swung his head to indicate the circling mountains. "Why, there ain't no way under the sun of locatin' a man in this country until he's down and out, and the buzzards are hangin' over him. Yep,

they'll let you git in to where you want to be. Then—"

The cattleman raised his shoulders significantly.

"All right, Sidmore," answered the sheriff. "We'll go where they want us to go."

He started to lead the way upward to the top of the great bench.

"Take holt of the lariat again, won't you?" asked Sidmore. "If they spy us out, they got to see me helpless."

Heald came back and seized the end of the trailing line; but his prisoner had a second request.

"You and Pomeroy, you won't expect me to do no shootin', will you? I ain't got the stomach to kill nobody, sheriff, much less the boys of the outfit."

The promise was promptly made.

"And when the fight comes," said Heald, "just what can I do for you then, in case it goes against Pomeroy and me?"

At that, a tremor shook Sidmore's stocky frame.

"Turn me loose," was the husky answer. "I'll run the chance of starvin' to death."

The sheriff came closer, to stare into his companion's face.

"What makes you so much afraid of Black?" he demanded.

The pale blue eyes fell before Heald's intent look, and Sidmore shifted on his feet uneasily.

"Sheriff," he said hesitatingly, "you don't think, do you, that in these United States, even as far from a lockup as the camp is, that a man like Steve Black can hire men by the month to murder?"

The other waited before replying.

"I've wondered about Black's men," he admitted presently. "They seem to stand by him like brothers, and carry out his orders like soldiers. You're hinting that there's some sort of explanation behind the arrangement."

Sidmore nodded.

"If I was to go back to the camp, I'd have to take whatever slack was handed me," he confessed ruefully. "That's because Black knows, and the boys know, just how I come to tie up with 'em, and why I'd have to stay."

What was meant began to be clear in Heald's mind.

"Black hires men that are wanted," he suggested.

"That's the idea."

"Clever! If a man's done one crime, he'll do another to keep out of the hands of the law. That's how Black has found it easy to get a dozen settlers killed off in this land fight. He's well named, for he's a black hearted specimen!"

The cattlemen did not speak.

"Sidmore," continued Heald, "I told you that you wouldn't be asked to squeal, and I meant it; but I can make you an offer on your own account. You'd like to clean your slate, wouldn't you?"

"I sure would!"

"Play square with me, and take me straight to Pomeroy. If I come out of this business alive, I'll see that you get a full pardon."

Sidmore's head wagged dubiously.

"About the worst thing I could do to Steve Black is to put the sheriff of this county on the straight trail to Pomeroy's," he pointed out. "If he was to ketch me at it—" He shivered, sucking his breath through his clenched teeth. "On the other hand, I sure want to git away from this range, and be able to live without shakin' in my boots every time some feller walks up behind me. Well, I'm in Dutch whichever way I turn, seems like!"

There was a woeful hang to his loose lips.

"You'd better choose to stand on the side of the law," advised Heald. "The whole county, and all this end of the State, feel that the situation up here is a sore. It's got to be cleaned up, and I'm going to clean it up, or die in the attempt. I consider that I was elected to office on a clean-up platform."

Presently, as Sidmore did not reply, but continued standing in deep thought, the sheriff went on:

"Help me, and I'll help you. That's a fair offer. Black can't make you one as good. He'll just give you a salary that's a joke—if he feels like it. Stand with me, Sidmore. Tell me what it is that this gang knows against you. Give me the low-down on it."

After another moment of wavering, Sidmore lifted a forlorn face.

"Do you recollect a train robbery down Milk Creek way about ten years ago?" he asked. "Well—well, I was the one that cut off the engine and run her a mile or two up the track. The fellers that was in on that job with me got killed by the express messenger."

Heald nodded.

"I remember. And now I remember the name—Charlie Sidmore; but I don't take back a word of what I said. You didn't shoot down unarmed men. If you'll make yourself useful to the State now, I'll see that it squares you."

"Shake on it, sheriff?"

Their hands met—Sidmore's two, manacled still, and Heald's right. Then the prisoner's shoulders sank, and he drew his breath in something like a sob.

"Sheriff," he added, "I'm still a young man, and I ain't ready to die—not by a blamed sight; but I got an awful funny feelin' about this business that's ahead. I ain't goin' to come out of it alive, no matter which way I turn—I know that for sure. Pomeroy prob'ly ain't got enough ammunition to shake a stick at, and look how little you got! But the boys—"

Heald laughed.

"Well, I'm younger than you, and I'm not anxious to pass in my checks, either; but this is my work, Charlie—work that three other men have side-stepped. Now I feel this way about it—the people of this State may be able to say that I failed up here in these mountains. All right, let 'em; but they'll never say that I failed and—went back!"

The pale eyes were watching the sunlit levels far below, the moving specks that were cattle, or horses, or mounted men, and the white thread that was the river.

"It's beautiful, ain't it, sheriff!" the cattlemen asked, speaking under his breath; "but I got to admit it's been just the same to me as a prison."

The sheriff laid a hand on his companion's shoulder.

"Listen to me! You had sand enough in you to help hold up a train. That turned out bad. Wrong things usually do, because holdup men are not organized, while the law is. Come along with me, and show just that same amount of spunk in the name of what's decent and square!"

Sidmore silently assented. He faced toward the near-by summit, and went shuffling up among the pines and firs with his captor.

During the remainder of that day they walked in silence, Sidmore weakly regretting his confession to Heald, and the younger man watching every foot of the ridge—to the front, to the rear, to right and left. Now the checkered shirt was

hidden under the sheriff's coat, to reduce the agony of apprehension felt by the other man; but as a partial protection to himself, Heald kept so close to his prisoner that an attack upon him would certainly endanger his companion.

Toward evening, as both were suffering keenly for want of food, the sheriff proposed that they should descend the slope of the ridge which was farther on their right, and there hunt and cook some game. Sidmore pleaded against the idea, urging that the sound of a pistol shot would carry for miles in that air, and that even the smoke of a fire might aid one of their enemies to find them.

For three days and nights they kept on, sparing only a few hours of each twenty-four for sleep, keeping on the summit of the bench, where their way was comparatively level, and talking seldom. They found water in abundance, and they rested themselves in security; but Heald's slender supply of chocolate seemed only to whet their appetites, and the pine nuts they ate—shaking these out of last year's cones—were rich in oil, but tiny, and troublesome to handle.

On the morning of the fourth day, luck played with the half starved men. As they roused their stiff bodies to action, they found that they were looking out upon what seemed to be the top of a boiling gray sea. The high levels where the cattle grazed, as well as the cañon on the other side of them, were flooded with thick fog. Out of it sounded lowing and neighing, the fluttering of small wings, and the never ceasing voice of the river.

"Sheriff," whispered Sidmore, "here's one time we can do what we like. Up in these mountains, when it's like this, a man can hear sounds terrible plain, but he can't for the life of him tell which way they're comin' from."

"And nobody can see our smoke," added Heald. "Well, Charlie, this is where you eat!"

In order to hunt, they did not get up and go searching through the trees and brush about them. Instead, they turned themselves so that they were seated back to back, and waited, the sheriff with Sidmore's pistol in his right hand and the smaller weapon in his left.

Presently, appearing out of the top level of the fog stretching below them, as if out of the edge of a surf, came a rabbit. Then

Heald's shot brought Sidmore scrambling to his feet in terror; but a moment later, grinning with eagerness, he was clearing a small open space of its carpet of needles, collecting a few stones to confine the fire, and gathering a supply of pine knots.

Their meal strengthened them. Carefully they put out the last spark of what had been a bed of coals, kicked the needles back across the bared ground and the dead fire, and hastened on, Sidmore more hopeful, Heald more ambitious.

Barely a mile farther along the ridge, something happened. The sheriff was walking second, and looking forward over Sidmore's lowered head, when suddenly, with a loud swishing of leaves and a pounding as of some heavy object, a living creature left a small clearing just ahead, and the sheriff saw—

What?

He did not know, for the thing was gone before he could get a good view. Was it the corner of a whisking garment? Was it the dark of a speeding shoe? Was it a sun-browned hand releasing a dragging branch?

He jerked Sidmore to a stop, and hauled him aside to the shelter of some close-set live oaks. There they stayed, breathless with suspense, until dark fell about them. Then they retreated noiselessly down the side of the ridge that was farthest from the meadow.

"What did it seem to be?" Sidmore whispered. "Bear, or deer? None of Black's men are huntin' through this mess of pea soup."

Heald reached to cover the other man's mouth. Over his blanket-wrapped body there rushed a cold wave, and on his arms and legs he felt the knitting of goose flesh. For the past hour or more he had been hearing stealthy movements—above them, below, and at their level.

Under his warning touch the other cowered, creeping against him, with heavier breathings, but Heald sat bolt upright, trying to see through the dark and the fog. He knew what he dared not tell Sidmore.

They were surrounded.

IV

BUT by whom were they surrounded, as by so many wolves or circling birds of prey? Were the stealthy unseen Pomeroy's people, or men from the cattle camp?

"One or the other," Heald told himself.

At first he did not try to think his problem out, but only listened, turning his head this way and that. He heard what he believed was a number of living creatures softly settling themselves down upon the leaves and pine needles of the steep slope. He heard breathing that was like Sidmore's.

"Out of wind, or scared," thought the sheriff.

Absolute quiet followed. Then Heald began to consider what he would say when the fog lifted and the light grew, and what he would do; for he realized that there was no chance of escape. Sidmore was clutching the corner of his coat with both manacled hands, exactly like a frightened child. The prisoner would not allow himself to be freed of the handcuffs, and would be incapable of creeping noiselessly away, even if his hands were separated; but the sheriff could not desert him.

"If only this lad Charlie wasn't such a baby!" Heald reflected. "Nobody would dare to shoot, for one of them would hit another. No—it's a case of stay, and get killed or captured—if I can't turn a trick."

The thought that these might be his last few hours on earth occurred to him; but he had considered the possibility of death from the first. He had expected his first bout with danger on the grade leading up to Black's, and he knew that every hour since had been filled with peril.

Great Valley had seen him ride out and up, headed toward the zone of murdering defiers of the law. When above the handful of shacks that made up the mountain town, he had reined in the strawberry roan and looked back, watching the smoke of half a dozen chimneys rise, curling, into the quiet air.

He had understood then that for many days to come he would be looking death in the face. Nevertheless, he had vowed, as he sat his horse, never to ride down into the settlement again, and on toward the distant county seat and the railroad line, until he had solved the Pomeroy mystery, and had looked upon the miles of grass land that were a lost—or, rather, a stolen—range.

Now, sitting in the dripping air, he recalled his vow.

"That's how it's to be," he declared. "I straighten this situation out, or I don't go back. There's more than just my career at stake. This business that's been

going on up here is a blight on the good name of the county. If I die—well, sometimes it's seemed to me that there's got to be sacrifice of life before justice gets done. My death may be the one thing that'll result in the clearing up of this scandal."

He set his jaws.

"Before I go under," he thought, "I'll let 'em know who I am, and tell 'em what they can expect if I don't get back to the county seat; and if this is the Steve Black gang that's around me, I'll take care of three or four of them before they can get me. This time it won't be a case of shooting a helpless man in the back!"

Sidmore's mind, too, was busy, while he stared into the wet blackness. The sheriff still held his bolt upright position. The cattleman's heavy body continued to press close against that of his captor, and every now and then he shivered with cold and with apprehension.

It was his fear that marshaled forward his temptation. He knew himself to be stronger and heavier than the sheriff. He asked himself if it would not be possible for him to straighten up and throw himself upon Heald, locking his manacled arms about the other, so that no pistol could be used. Then Sidmore could shout for the circle of waiting men to close in.

Another thought checked him. Suppose Pomeroy and some of his crowd, if he had a crowd, were close at hand!

"In that case," decided Sidmore, "I'd have just one friend on this mountain. No, I mustn't set Heald against me. Thundereation, no!"

After that, no longer did he waver between action and inaction, weighing whether he would attack the sheriff or not. He completely gave up the idea of trying to take the situation into his own hands—though to capture Heald now, in the very presence, as it were, of Black's men, would surely go far toward reinstating him in the good graces of the boss cattleman and his followers.

Weakness and weariness had their share in making Sidmore give up his plan. Before long his breathing became regular, and he slept, his ironed hands holding, as before, to the coat of the younger man.

Meanwhile Heald, with a traitor weighing the pros and cons of a sudden attack at his side, had been studying out what he would say to the hidden watchers before the coming of the light. If those watchers

were Steve Black's men, as he now thought, he could not under any circumstances tell them the real plans of the sheriff's office—plans which, whether Heald lived or died, were to be carried out.

At the same time, the sheriff felt that such a warning, voiced here and now, might hold back the enemy from assassinating him at daybreak. If those who were on watch should turn out to be under Pomeroy's command, what he had to say might at least postpone the attack, and later he could tell Pomeroy the whole truth.

"What 'll I say?" he asked himself.

When he had outlined his forthcoming speech, he could not keep from smiling, for there was something comical about what he had thought up. He would stagger his listeners with a startling announcement. He could picture to himself the look on their faces.

He recalled how, when he had first caught sight of the wide green stretches of the first meadow, he had told Sidmore, almost in jest, that the government could rout Steve Black and his crowd with the aid of airplanes.

Now this same half jest appealed to him as the right thing to be said to the unseen circle of listeners. Sidmore had opened his mild blue eyes at the picture which the sheriff's declaration had lifted before his mind. The cattleman's reaction had shown Heald that not only his prisoner, but others of the Black persuasion, would regard the airplane attack as a real possibility.

"I'll make 'em prick up their ears!" he promised himself.

Gently he rested a hand on Sidmore's shoulder, where he could restrain his companion if the latter, roused by Heald's voice, were to attempt to spring up. The touch wakened Sidmore, whereupon Heald patted that shoulder reassuringly.

"Hello, out there!" he began.

In three directions there instantly followed a sudden stirring and a crackling of the damp needles and leaves.

"Stay right where you sit!" a voice commanded preemptorily.

"All right!" replied the sheriff.

The air then seemed for a moment electric, as if anything might happen. Neither Heald nor Sidmore moved so much as a finger, knowing their danger; and into the stillness there came a rhythmic beat, loud and insistent, which the sheriff presently discovered was inside his own head.

"I want to tell all of you who I am," he began again. "Then, while the dark lasts, I want you to think over what I tell you, because I am Heald, the new sheriff of this county."

He stopped, but no one replied, and once more a complete quiet prevailed. After a moment, he went on:

"Several hundred people in other parts of this county know that I rode out of Great Valley alone, bound for Steve Black's. They know I came to find Rolfe Pomeroy and his family, and to look over this grass situation up here. Every sheriff before me has said that the capture of Steve Black's men was impossible, because no posse could live to get up the grade to his cattle camp, the trail being always watched by armed men. Even an armored car wouldn't get up safely, they said, much less a bunch of saddle horses. Well, I've planned something that *can* get up the grade, and can't be stopped. If I'm not back in Great Valley, safe and sound, just two weeks from now, my deputies will come into the Five Meadows in airplanes."

Once more he paused; but as before no one answered him, and no one moved. It was as if what he had said had had an effect upon his hearers that was more or less paralyzing.

Again he began to speak:

"When I don't show up with Steve Black in my custody, the airplanes are to use regular war methods on the Black camp—yes, even if I am there myself. I have left orders to have the whole place blown up."

In breathless silence Heald waited for a response, but none came. After several minutes he dropped sideways in a half reclining position, drew his blanket over him, and, with Sidmore hunched against him, his face buried in his arms through fear of bullets, the sheriff slept.

V

HEALD woke with the first lightening of the mist, when he was able to see the pistols grasped in his own hands. His body was painfully stiff and sore under that half blanket wet with fog. Sidmore was still dreaming, but he had slipped downhill a foot or more, so that his frowzy red head was bare.

As Heald raised himself to an elbow, he heard a slight sound from down the mountainside, and fell to peering in that direc-

tion. Presently, to one side of a tree trunk, he caught a touch of color—a faint blue. He watched the spot, and soon made out a face above the blue.

Presently a head was thrust from behind the bole of a pine. About the head was bound a handkerchief which had once been red. From under the handkerchief were thrust out wisps of untidy, graying hair. These fringed the face, which was so strange that it was almost terrifying.

"A woman?" the sheriff asked himself.

A pair of small black eyes played from side to side like the eyes of a baboon. As they danced, they had a queer light and fire; yet they were old, for the skin about them was crinkled. Next, the growing light showed Heald a countenance which, except for the black eyes, seemed to have been modeled out of a piece of yellow silk stained and worn by time.

A certain recollection came into the mind of the sheriff, and he smiled at the unlovely mask. At that a long, thin mouth sprang apart in its lower half, and a few discolored teeth showed above a neck that was but little larger than Heald's wrist.

"Hello, John Chinaman!" he called out cheerfully.

To his right something moved. He took his look from the partly screened Chinese—who, as he now saw, was in torn and faded blue clothes, but barefooted, and armed only with an old musket—and turned half about, to see what was in the other direction. He found himself staring into the black bore of a down-slanting rifle.

The weapon was held against the shoulder of a man who was evidently white—an oldish man, bearded, with longish hair that lay against his neck, both beard and hair being tinged with gray. On his head the man wore an ancient slouch hat, which might once have been black, but which was now an indefinite green from wear and rain and dust, and was so torn that it was almost shapeless.

The man's clothes were as forlorn as his hat. The upper part of his thin body was hidden by a piece of a shirt and a square of old blanket, the latter hanging, in Spanish fashion, over one shoulder. His trousers were varicolored with patches. On his sockless feet were rudely made moccasins of deerhide, tied with thongs.

"Pomeroy!"

Pomeroy's arms did not relax, and the rifle stayed at his shoulder.

"Don't move!" he warned.

"That's all right," replied the sheriff. "I know when a man's got the drop on me."

"If you move," Pomeroy went on, "I'll kill you the same second!"

Even with the rifle pointing straight at his breast, Heald could not help contrasting the tone of this man's voice with his appearance; for the harried settler whom he had come to rescue was not talking the lingo of the mountains or the range.

"Pomeroy," said the sheriff, "you're speaking like an educated man."

"Well," Pomeroy answered, "you sound like a sheriff, right enough, but I'll be hanged if you look like one."

"I've been crawling up and down these mountains for days," Heald replied, "keeping out of the way of Black's gang, and trying to get nearer to you."

The eyes at the farther end of the gunstock did not soften.

"Yes, it's likely," Pomeroy commented ironically, "that the sheriff of this county would be creeping up and down these hills in this style! My friend, either Steve Black thinks he's smart enough to catch me by faking you up, or else you're a couple of get-aways from some lockup."

Heald laughed good-naturedly.

"No, sir—you're wrong," he declared. "I'm the sheriff, sure as you're born. I look like a vag, but you don't look any better, Mr. Pomeroy. As my feet are skinned raw with walking, suppose you step over here and take a squint at my credentials."

"Shen!" sang out Pomeroy. "You go up, take pistol."

The sheriff saw the figure below him suddenly stiffen.

"All right, Shen," he said kindly. "You come, take 'em. No danger!"

He let both weapons fall out of his hands upon the steep ground. Then, by drawing up a foot, he carefully pushed them, one at a time, toward the Chinese, who had laid aside the musket and was clambering uphill on hands and feet.

As Shen knelt to gather the two pistols into his hands, Pomeroy, without relaxing his aim, asked a question:

"Who's that with you?"

"This is the man Steve Black sent down the grade to meet me," replied Heald. Then, having briefly related the story of his stay at the cattle camp, and his short

dialogue with Black, he told of his capture of Sidmore. "You see that I've got this chap still ironed," he added.

"Turn him over to me, will you?" bade Pomeroy.

"Don't you let him shoot me!" pleaded Sidmore, without lifting his head. "I ain't ree-sponsible for what Black did to him! Tell him that, sheriff!"

"Sit up, Sidmore," bade Heald. "Nobody's going to hurt you."

As the cattleman pushed himself to a sitting position by leaning on his shackled hands, Pomeroy came a few steps nearer. Shen had backed, sliding, to where his musket lay, and was again in possession of it; so Pomeroy allowed his own weapon to lower, while he studied the disheveled figure beside Heald.

"I know that bird by sight," was Pomeroy's comment. "You other one"—he raised his rifle once more—"if you've got any papers worth looking at—"

"I've got letters for you from three of your old friends," replied Heald.

"Sounds good," was the rejoinder; "but I'm going to be mighty sure that this whole performance isn't a trick. I've kept out of Black's way, and haven't tried to take a slice of the meadows; but he's a hog. He wants all the meadows, and the mountains to boot."

The sheriff had taken off his coat, stripped its right sleeve inside out, and taken a tiny package of onionskin paper from under the cap of the sleeve. He carefully flattened the paper out, when it resolved itself into three thin sheets of letter size. He held these up to Pomeroy; but the latter made no move toward taking them.

"You come and look them over, Noreen," he bade.

Heald faced directly away from the speaker, and saw the third person of this small and curiously assorted mountain band. At first the sheriff believed that he was staring at a boy, for the slight figure wore a sleeveless jacket of coyote skins and a pair of knee trousers. The jacket was loose, and hung well below the waist, where it was belted by a rude contrivance which held cartridges. The bare, brown arms held a rifle.

A glance from the curious wild dress to a pale, squarish face, around which thick brown hair hung in damp waves, told Heald that this last member of the trio was a girl.

Dark blue, startled eyes studied him, and he could see that the past night, as well as the present conference, had been a severe strain on Pomeroy's daughter, for she was trembling.

Heald smiled at her.

"I'm afraid we've been making you very nervous, Miss Noreen," he said. Then, holding out the thin sheets: "But when you've looked over these, and your father sees them—"

Her hand shook as she took the papers. Without attempting to read a letter, she passed behind the two who were seated on the ground, and went to Pomeroy. After that, for a few minutes, there was silence, while father and daughter stood together, the lips of the former moving as he repeated the words of the first message.

"Well, Noreen," he said presently, "now you can say you've seen a man's handwriting!"

She nodded.

"It looks the way I thought it would," she answered.

"Guess it's from Henry Slocum, all right," her father continued. Then, coming toward his prisoners, without waiting to examine the other messages: "You must be hungry, Mr. Heald."

"Slocum said his letter would do the trick," returned the sheriff, rising.

"That's the first word I've had from civilization in twelve years," Pomeroy said, and his voice broke suspiciously. "I—I can't exactly tell you what—what a queer feeling Slocum's letter gave me!"

The exile laughed, now, but his eyes were brimming.

The sheriff saw that his captor was an older man than he had at first thought. Through the rents in the shabby slouch hat bald spots could be seen. The alert hazel eyes were watching Heald smilingly; and the latter realized that about this ragged, harried creature, who had been driven back into the wilds for more than a decade, there was a strange air that was somehow like one of triumph.

"I'm mighty glad to find you well, and not broken," declared the sheriff. "You know, we've never been sure whether you were even alive in here, but Black did say something about a Chinaman who came in."

The hazel eyes hardened.

"Did he?" exclaimed Pomeroy. "The polecat! I'll bet my last rag that he didn't tell you how his crowd beat Shen up!"

"No."

"They did, just the same. When he got to me, he had welts on him from a black-snake that were as wide as my two fingers."

"I'm not surprised."

Then both suddenly looked at Sidmore, still seated at their feet. His heavy body was curved forward toward his feet, and his head was lowered apprehensively.

"I suppose *you* saw that cowering handed out," said Pomeroy bitterly, touching one of Sidmore's boots with the tip of his moccasin.

The red head was nodded.

"Pomeroy," began the sheriff, "the time has come for all kinds of reckonings. In the night I told you something of the plan that I've got under way for clearing out this rotten situation."

"You did, but I can't grasp it. We've never seen a flying machine, sheriff. I'm afraid that if we do see one, we're almost sure to stampede."

Above the bent head of Sidmore, Heald gave Pomeroy a meaning look. They went aside then, the girl following, until they were out of the cattleman's hearing. For a time the sheriff spoke low, while Pomeroy and his daughter listened, the former with his look still on Sidmore, but Noreen with her eyes lowered shyly.

Pomeroy shook his head as Heald finished speaking.

"Well, sir," he said, "we didn't ever think we'd have help against Black. No, I'd about given up hope, and we thought we'd have to start out across a range that's pretty much covered with snow the year around; but this—this is great luck!"

"It was luck that you found me," replied the sheriff.

Pomeroy laughed.

"No, you found us. We made a jump to get out of sight, I can tell you!"

"I judge from Shen's clothes that he was the one I caught sight of as he was dusting."

Once more the laughter was gone out of Pomeroy's eyes. He took Heald by the arm.

"For years Black has been trying to kill me. Well, maybe I'll get a chance at him now!"

"And cheat me out of the joy of taking him through Great Valley with irons on his wrists?" demanded the sheriff. "No, don't do that, Pomeroy. Oh, I know he's killed a lot of decent men in here; but that's why

I want him. Just to kill him wouldn't do. It would make him a sort of hero."

"Give me a chance at some of his crowd, then," persisted the other.

"Sidmore says they're all escaped criminals, or men who are on the run," Heald answered. "I figure that if trouble breaks, they'll all take to the timber. I doubt I'll get my hands on more than one or two; but Black's the man I want. Black's the one I've got to have. In fact, Mr. Pomeroy, I shan't go back without Black."

Pomeroy's face was burning.

"A low-lived rascal!" he declared. "A trial's too good for him."

"Maybe, but the county wants a good look at him. I shan't disappoint the voters, if I can help it." He chuckled. "When I saw him at the camp, I was purposely pretty fresh with him. That was to get his dander up, so he'd begin to ache to put some lead into me with his own hand. Then I took Sidmore prisoner, and I'm hoping the whole business will fetch Black this way, and out of his den."

Pomeroy grinned, lifted his rifle, and turned it over and over, studying it and caressing it.

"If a man waits long enough," he observed, "and prays hard enough, what he waits for and prays for will come!"

"You don't mean me," asserted Heald, laughing. "What I can't altogether understand is, why are you up here? Did you expect me?"

Pomeroy shook his head.

"For twelve years I've been waiting and praying for Black and his gang to show up. All right! But I asked for help at the same time, and here it is. We're up here, sheriff, because night before last we had to get out of our cañon."

"Had to get out?"

"Shen's been watching, as usual. Yesterday morning he came yelping to my shack. Said he saw men."

Heald was puzzled.

"Us?"

"Not you—not at that time, anyhow. Sheriff, right down under us is my place. Now we'll pick up your friend yonder, and we'll go to a spot farther along, where you'll be able to get a view."

"You mean—" said Heald incredulously, and stopped.

Pomeroy was still stroking the butt of his gun.

"Sheriff," he continued, "our work's cut

out for us. Right down there in my place"—he pointed—"this very instant, are Steve Black and four of his men!"

VI

THE sheriff choked, hardly able to find his voice in his excitement and joy.

"Steve Black's here? Steve and his men? Why didn't you tell me that before, Mr. Pomeroy? Say, this 'll make everything come right, if we go carefully!"

"I thought that would fetch you up on your toes!" returned the older man, laughing. "Now I suppose you'll want to capture the bunch, so's you can walk into Great Valley with 'em."

"Give me something to eat," Heald returned. "My brain won't work the way I want it to until I've had some grub."

Sidmore was already gnawing upon something which had been given him by Shen—a long, dry twist of something, which turned out to be jerked beef. Pomeroy had more of the beef; and soon all were breakfasting upon it, the sheriff and his prisoner eating greedily.

"This is something like!" vowed Sidmore. "Say, I never want to look at another slab of choc'late as long as I live! A man don't git far on candy."

"We don't need to worry about our meals," Pomeroy declared. "Shen and I have put caches of food in three or four places around here. We can give you plenty of dried beans, for one thing, and corn, and peas, and smoked venison."

"I'm mighty glad to hear you haven't lacked in the eating line," said Heald. "I've heard you had beef when you wanted it, but I didn't think about a garden."

"I brought all kinds of seed in with me when I came," reminded Pomeroy. "Mrs. Pomeroy always had a fine garden. After we lost her, Shen came along, and he's been looking after the vegetables."

"What have you done for supplies?"

"We've taken the best care we could of what we had; but we've slowly watched our things wearing out, until we're pretty well out of most things, especially cooking tins, thread, cloth, and so on. I brought a good many bolts of denim in when I came. Now it's all been cut up."

"I'm just in time," returned the sheriff. "After this, I believe you'll have no trouble fetching in whatever you need."

Pomeroy exchanged a smiling look with his daughter.

"We aren't going to want things brought in," he answered. "The time's come when we can go out. There's a lot that I want to show Noreen, and there's more that I haven't seen myself. The world's been moving since I left it. Last night you spoke about flying machines. We've watched the sky many a time, Noreen and I. You see, Shen told us men were flying. Of course, I'd heard that before; but I've been up in this northern part of the State for more than twenty years. Well, I hope we'll get a look at your flyers, sheriff; but I think it 'll almost knock us down."

"Men are talking across space without any wires between them," said Heald. "That 'll surprise you when you see it done."

"I should say!" exclaimed Pomeroy. "Noreen and I'll have a lot to enjoy." She was beside him, and he patted her arm. Again there was the hint of a happy secret of some sort. "Eh, Noreen?"

"Yes," she said. "And I'll have to study, dad."

"What do you think, sheriff?" her father went on. "My girl, of course, didn't have any advantages up here while she was little. Her mother and I taught her what we could. When I came in, I brought some books, but I didn't bring enough paper; so Noreen's learned to write by using a stick on wet sand—creek sand, mind you, and a wet stick."

Heald felt his eyes smart.

"We'll be very cautious about what lies ahead of us," he said. "We don't want to make any false moves that 'll cheat Miss Noreen out of all the things that civilization can give her."

The girl smiled, her pale face coloring with pleasure.

"But I haven't suffered any," she protested. "Dad says I'm the strongest girl in the State."

"Never a sick day," boasted Pomeroy. "Can shoot better than I can, and run like a deer. In the daytime, she's the one that's done the watching—of the trail, I mean."

"You've got a pretty good ranch?" asked the sheriff. "Surely there can't be much level ground this far in?"

Pomeroy's shoulders were shaking. Once he shot a look at Shen, who was sitting a few feet away, with his legs folded, and his musket across his knees, like some old armed statue.

"Yes, we've got a pretty good ranch,"

Pomeroy answered presently, still as if he were inclined to laugh.

While Heald and Sidmore were busy eating, Pomeroy took Shen aside. Noreen joined them, and the three stood for some minutes, Pomeroy doing most of the talking, but Shen breaking in now and again with his pidgin English, while he gestured with the musket and a hand that was like a claw.

Only Shen returned. Then Heald went over to where Pomeroy stood whispering to his daughter.

"Now, Mr. Pomeroy," said the sheriff, "you know the lay of things down yonder at your place. Suppose you give me your opinion as to the best way to go about this business." Then, lowering his voice: "Don't keep me in the dark about anything, will you? I can't help you reach a decision unless I know just how everything stands."

"What makes you think I'd keep anything back?" demanded Pomeroy, a queer expression in those hazel eyes.

"I feel that there's something hidden," replied Heald. "I can't get just what. You haven't planted a powder blow-up for Black, have you?"

"Ha!" breathed the other. "I wish I could say yes to that! No, powder is one thing we are short of, and never waste." Then, grinning: "The fact is, sheriff, Shen and I have been mining."

"So that's it! I hope you've found something."

Once more a flash of triumph in Pomeroy's look.

"Yes, something," he replied, and glanced at Noreen.

"Good! You haven't been shut in here for nothing, then. I hope you've got your notices up."

"I've made the staking of the claims as legal as I could."

"Black will stumble upon your mine, won't he?"

"Bound to," answered Pomeroy. "We've been washing dirt in the old way. Half of a whole sidehill is gouged out. A man, if he's on the right ridge, could see the place for miles."

"If that gang gets greedy for gold," said Heald, "it 'll be worse than their land greed. Well, what can be done?"

"I'll admit that the only plan I've got would call for pot-shooting."

"You might get one rascal, but the

others would jump to cover. Then you'd never know who was lurking around and who wasn't. If you ever got back to your house, the odds would be in favor of the men who might be posted here and there in the brush. If you can't get back—well, they're in your house, and all they've got to do is to sit tight and keep you in the timber until the bad weather comes. In the meantime my men might be able to get in, but they might slip up on it if Black was back at his camp."

"I'm ready to hear your ideas," Pomeroy asserted earnestly.

"Somehow or other we must corner Black," the sheriff went on. "We can't cut him out of the crowd, the way you might take a beef out of his herd. No—it's got to be done some other way; and since you've mentioned gold—"

He paused, waiting to see what the other man would reply.

Pomeroy stared at the ground.

"H-m! I see your idea. You mean bribe him somehow?"

Heald laughed.

"Oh, you couldn't bribe Black," he answered. "Why, he's got everything his way, Mr. Pomeroy; but I was wondering if we couldn't use Sidmore. Suppose we send him down to our friend. He will take Black aside and tell him where you've got something covered up. If Black could be tempted into going with Sidmore to that spot—"

Pomeroy interrupted him.

"I believe you're right! Say, this suggestion of yours might work out first-class! It might if Black would bite—would fall for a temptation."

"Now you've got it! Where could we send him? He ought to see that dug out place in the mountain first."

"Listen, sheriff! Listen!"

Taking Heald by an arm, Pomeroy whispered excitedly, and pointed, while the sheriff listened, and nodded, and put in a word now and again.

"At first sight it looks foolish," Pomeroy admitted, when he had finished. "At least, Shen might think so, and Shen's my partner. He's just said, though, that I can do what I think is best."

"You let me talk to Sidmore," urged Heald, and started the older man toward the bent figure dozing in the newly risen sun.

Next Pomeroy had a few whispered

words with the Chinese. Then the five sat, Noreen to the rear of the grouped men, her rifle handy, her look traveling from right to left as she stood guard.

"She might be sitting with a tennis racket on her knee," observed Heald.

"She's as brave as a lion," boasted Pomeroy.

"Well," added the sheriff, "down at the county seat I've got one of the nicest mothers in all creation. She'll love to take your girl under her wing, Mr. Pomeroy, when all this racket has been straightened out through Sidmore."

The red head was lifted suddenly at that.

"Who, me?" asked the cattleman. "I'd sell myself for a nickel, sheriff, and figger that the buyer was stung!"

"It isn't as bad as that," Heald answered. "Mr. Pomeroy here has found a mine, Sidmore. It's evidently one of the richest gold mines in this State. He and the Chinaman have been taking out plenty of yellow stuff. Do you want some of it?"

"I wouldn't what you'd call turn down about two quarts of dust, if it was offered me," Sidmore replied half humorously.

"I thought so. Well, listen. You're going to escape from us, with your handcuffs still on. Steve Black's not more than a mile from here. You're to put my bullet-proof jacket on you, under that shirt, and go down and find him. Call out to him as you get close to the house, and he'll let you come up. He'll want to hear the news about me."

Sidmore had been moving apprehensively. Now he drew back, shuddering.

"I don't want to look up Black, sheriff," he pleaded. "Thunder, I'm as afraid of him—say, there ain't no way to describe it! Oh, I'm a coward, all right—I don't have to tell you that. No—don't ask me to tell Black nothin'!"

"Sidmore, I couldn't make you an offer out of the county funds that would make the business attractive to you; but Mr. Pomeroy is a rich man. Suppose you knew that when you left these mountains you'd have fifteen thousand dollars' worth of dust on your back!"

"Fifteen thousand!"

"That's something worth having, isn't it, Sidmore?"

"Tell me how I got to do this business. Gosh, Pomeroy, you must have struck it rich!"

Pomeroy threw up his head.

"Money's no object with me," he replied, with more than a touch of bragging. "I guess I'm one of the richest men in the whole State. This is your chance at a pile, Sidmore. The sheriff 'll get you off clear, because you take our side, and you'll have enough cash to take care of you comfortably for life."

Sidmore's temptation was complete.

"Tell me again," he urged. "Give me the whole stunt plain."

Step by step Heald took the other from the start to the finish of the plan.

"Point out to Black that the mine is the reason why Mr. Pomeroy never wanted to get away. He'll want to know how it happens that we let you know the low-down. Well, we didn't think you'd get away from us, but you were smart. All right! Black's men will be all excited. Probably they've seen the mine already, and they won't doubt the truth of what you're saying. The whole bunch will follow you. Maybe they won't even leave a single man on watch."

Sidmore trembled.

"If you're stringin' me," he declared, "when the boss finds out it's a yarn, he'll kill me sure!"

"You're not getting strung," retorted Pomeroy, impatient.

"Sounds kind of fishy," was the reply.

"You've had the straight truth," continued Heald. "The only thing I want you to keep from Black is the fact that I'm the sheriff. Let him think I'm just a friend of Mr. Pomeroy's, as I told him myself up at the camp."

"Suppose he don't bite!" argued Sidmore. "He ain't goin' to go and stick his head in a trap. He'll send one of the boys. Then where are you?"

"He'll never take your story of a gold cache on hearsay, Sidmore," promised Heald. "I tell you he'll want to see it with his eyes. All we want is to get him separated from the others—or to get him into a corner with all of them."

"And in the shootin', I'll finish up," complained Sidmore. "Oh, there's an awful pile of risk about this business!"

"A man has to do something for fifteen thousand dollars," Heald returned. "You're not going to be happy if we take another tack, either—especially if you lose a chance at that much money."

"Don't know but what you're right,"

assented Sidmore. He was like a small boy who, desiring the jam, fears the strap. Then, of a sudden, he appeared to brighten. "Which way did you say the house was?" he wanted to know.

"Off here to the left," Pomeroy answered. "You can make it in half an hour. If you were coming the other way, though, it would be a pretty hard climb. Start to hoot, every now and then, whenever you feel like it."

Sidmore seemed thoughtful while, with one wrist free, the bullet-proof jacket was fastened securely about him, and then covered by the checkered shirt.

"Remember that you must be terribly hungry," reminded Heald. "We've treated you pretty snide, Sidmore—make a lot out of that. You hate us, and will do anything against us; but we're miles away, up this cañon. You got away in the fog and the dark last night, and traveled like sixty. Got it all in your head?"

Sidmore nodded.

"Got it all, sheriff. I'll be all right if Steve Black don't shoot me on sight."

"Make a point of it that you must share in the big haul. If you don't insist on that, he'll be suspicious."

"No, he won't," vowed Pomeroy. "When Black sees the way your wrists look, Sidmore, he'll believe anything. It's mighty lucky for us all that you didn't let the sheriff take off those irons. They're convincing enough for anybody; but even if he doubts—"

Heald chuckled.

"His men won't. They'll itch to get their eyes on the cache. Don't find it too easy, after Mr. Pomeroy shows you where it is. Look several places, Sidmore. Make the hunt as gradual as you can, and try to mislead yourself a time or two. Can you remember to do that?"

"I ain't been showed the exact spot," said Sidmore. "Is that the idea?"

"Right! You heard about the place, but you must locate it with the help of Black and his crowd. If he's afraid of being double-crossed, he'll send some of the men with you. When you've made the find, you let out a yell of joy. If he comes running, and you get a chance, make a skip right then and there."

Sidmore was ready, but he was pale even under his stubbly beard.

"If I git out of this with a whole skin," he promised, "I'm off to Cuba, or some-

wheres like that! You ain't goin' to ask me to stop so's to give evidence against this bunch, are you, sheriff?"

"You won't mind staying at the county seat for awhile, if you're safe under lock and key," argued Heald. "When you've helped me cinch Black's sentence, I'll help you lose yourself. Everything 'll be fine for you—no more fear of arrest—plenty of cash."

Sidmore looked from one man to the other in a dazed sort of way. He was listening and thinking at the same time—a difficult feat to him.

"Shake on it," he said presently, nodding, and gave his hand to the other two.

VII

THE sheriff straightened up, went to Shen for his weapons, and took a look around him. By now the sun had driven the mist from the ridges, and only about the highest peaks were there traces of cloud. The fog-soaked pines charged the air with their odor. Food, warmth, and the piny breaths that he drew seemed to give him back his strength.

"You lead, Mr. Pomeroy," he directed.

He walked beside the older man as the party set off. Directly behind them came Noreen, followed by Sidmore, with Shen bringing up the rear. The five climbed first to the top of the ridge at their back. Then they set off along it, taking the direction from which Heald and Sidmore had veered the day before. Pomeroy watched ahead, Heald to the right, Noreen to the left, and Shen toward the rear. No one spoke.

Two hours later, hot and thirsty after their quick march, they suddenly halted at the top of a sharp declivity. Pomeroy motioned the others to turn aside with him into some underbrush. Having passed through the growth, they came out upon a pebbly knob which was bare of needles and leaves.

"Stand quiet," said Pomeroy. "They won't catch sight of us if we don't move. Now look down yonder, straight ahead, and after awhile you'll see a house. When you've located the house, I'll show you something else."

"I see the house," announced Sidmore.

Pomeroy turned his head toward the sheriff.

"Yes, and I can see men," he said.

The settler's mouth was trembling so

that his beard jerked; but Heald knew that the trembling was not fear.

"Show us where that clump of dogwood is," suggested the sheriff. "Then Sidmore can get away."

"Look at the fireplace," bade Pomeroy. "I won't point. I'll take you from the house to the dogwood gradually. First, pass the pines that stand this way. Then there's a water wheel, where a little creek comes down. Jump the creek, and the dogwood clump is the second bunch of growth from the creek. You'll know it because the hill's steep right there."

"Is it all right for me to go now?" Sidmore inquired.

"If you're sure you've got the lay of things," Heald answered.

"Yep!"

Like a swimmer making a dive, he was gone. The sheriff had taken his hat from him, thinking that his story would carry the better if he were bareheaded, and that he would be the more readily recognized if his red hair was uncovered.

Scarcely was he lost to the sight of the four who stayed behind, when Pomeroy motioned all to retreat. Even as the sheriff turned, he caught the intent posture of Pomeroy's daughter, her head bent forward as she peered down upon her father's foes. The whole pose of her boyish figure was graphic and wild, as if she were a hunted creature. It made Heald realize how these people had lived for years in daily fear of a murderous enemy.

"What has the county been up to all this time?" he said to Pomeroy.

The older man laughed bitterly.

"Well, sheriff, I wouldn't have been left to myself if the men who held your office these last ten years had ever guessed that Shen and I were taking out gold!"

As quickly as possible, the four now changed their position on the ridge, and plunged downhill toward Pomeroy's house. Their way led them along a dry watercourse, and their progress was shielded by walls of freshet-worn rock and dirt.

Sidmore's halloo came up to them before they had covered one-quarter of their distance. From where they hurried along the steep path, they were not able to note the effect of that first cry upon Black's men—a gathering of three who were stationed on watch—nor could they see the cattle boss's tall figure spring to the door.

"Oh, wouldn't I like to be a little bird

under the eaves of my own house for the next half hour?" exclaimed Pomeroy.

"I hope Sidmore will keep his directions straight in his head," returned Heald. "He hasn't much brains, and what he has are just about sick with scare."

After that, they kept silence, and took pains to go more quietly, at the same time keeping up their rapid descent in the deep stream trough.

From time to time, Sidmore's shout carried to them from where he was racing through the trees and brush of a near-by slope:

"Boys! Boys! Boys!"

He had scarcely reached the base of the great ridge, however, when the four emerged from their gully under shelter of the heavy dogwood clumps which bordered it, and filed, almost on tiptoe, into a small, vine-draped, stone-built retreat which commanded the approach to Pomeroy's.

"Food, ammunition, and water here," said Pomeroy. "If I'd had plenty of cartridges, I'd never have left here yesterday. Couldn't risk standing a siege, though—not with Noreen along, anyhow."

The sheriff was at one of the openings of the fortlike place.

"There's Sidmore," he whispered. "He's about fifty yards from your front door. They're cautious, you see."

"But once they see the gold, sheriff—"

"That's what I'm banking on, Mr. Pomeroy. Unless I'm mightily mistaken, when they catch sight of the yellow stuff, they're going to lose their heads. They're going to go downright crazy."

Standing close by at a second porthole in the stone wall, Pomeroy restlessly turned the rifle in his hands and stared at the scene being played half a mile away.

"That's exactly what I want!" he murmured. "That's what I've waited for! Now, if only Sidmore can follow out our directions!"

"At the last," returned the sheriff, "I could see a change in him. Did you? He was willing, all of a sudden. Look at him now. He's shaking hands with some one. Doesn't feel so scared now, probably."

Heald laughed silently.

Down where he was standing in front of Pomeroy's house, Sidmore, almost faint with relief, was showing his manacled wrists to a former acquaintance, and talking like a madman:

"Bill, take me to the boss! Bill, that

guy that come through the camp was the sheriff of this county! I've just got away from him and Pomeroy, and blamed near got killed doin' it! They'd 'a' shot me, only they knowed you'd hear the gun! Bill, I want to go inside! Is Mr. Black there? Let's git away from this open ground! Boss! Boss!"

Next he had left the staring cowboy and made for Pomeroy's front door. As Heald had only just remarked, he had experienced a sudden change as the sheriff and Pomeroy were preparing him for his part in their project. All at once, scant as were his wits, he had seen, stretching plain before him, a new plan—a plan of his own.

So far as he was concerned, it was the right one. He seemed to know that instantly. If he followed it, not only would he receive good treatment from Steve Black, but he could count upon the cattle boss's everlasting friendship and gratitude. At the same time, he could count upon putting aside for his own use several times fifteen thousand dollars.

"And no risk to me!" he told himself jubilantly. "The sheriff's way, why, there was piles of risk—just heaps of it! But the way I got it laid out, there ain't none!"

VIII

"Boss! Mr. Black! It's Charlie—Charlie Sidmore!"

As the figure in the checkered shirt swayed in the doorway of Pomeroy's windowless living room, a second figure rose out of the gloom to meet him—Steve Black, this one, his small eyes staring in astonishment, his three-fingered right hand grasping a rifle.

"What? *You?*" demanded the big man, and cursed as he half circled in order to put himself between Sidmore and the light. "Well, you look in a grand fix! What you been up to?"

"Don't be hard on me, boss!" Sidmore pleaded. Uncertainty regarding the manner of his reception had taken the last bit of strength out of his legs. He sank to the floor, holding his steel-cuffed hands in front of him. "Give me a drink, boss, and somethin' to eat! Boss, that was the sheriff that come up from Great Valley and rode out with me!"

To that Black made no reply, but sat again, studying Sidmore and inwardly raging. For all that Sidmore's appearance was so changed, there was no doubting that

the kneeling man was he. His pale blue eyes looked out of the thin, bristling face, under a shock of stringy red hair in which fragments of leaves were caught.

Sidmore could scarcely articulate, and he did not look at Black.

"Heald knocked me off my horse," he declared. "While I was plumb out, he got these things on me. Since then he's starved me, and hardly give me water enough. All I've had is a few mouthfuls of candy; but I've got it on him now! I've got somethin' to tell you, Mr. Black! Give me a drink, and—"

"Give this fool some water!" bellowed Black, with an outthrust of one boot as if he were about to kick the prostrate man.

"I want to talk to you by yourself," went on Sidmore. Now he gazed straight at the other man, and nodded significantly. "All by yourself, boss."

Even while a dipper was held to his mouth, he stared over the rim of it as he drank.

"Bring him some of them crackers," supplemented Black. "He's kind of off his head, if I ain't mistaken. Where's a swaller of that last poison you mixed, Jeff? That 'll pep him up some."

The man called Jeff offered Sidmore some biscuits that were reduced to crumbs, and a flask of strong smelling liquid. With every appearance of starvation, Sidmore crammed his mouth with the bits of bread, dampening them from the bottle.

"And, Jeff"—Black lowered his voice—"tell Shorty and Al that Sid's back. You boys better stay, one out from every side of the house, until I can get on to just what Sidmore knows. Hurry, Jeff, but leave the bottle."

Jeff was an oldish man, wearing a sweater that came so far up his narrow chest that it all but rolled against the brim of his wide hat. He set the flask down, laid a package of cigarettes beside it, and limped out, with a whispered word to the man who had first greeted Sidmore.

"Shut the door," the newly returned one begged huskily. "Boss," he went on, as Black complied, and the room suddenly darkened, "I got news for you—the best news you ever heard tell in all your born life!"

"Git it out!"

Sidmore plunged into his tale as he had dived into the cañon.

"Ain't no farmin' here, is there? Ain't

no orchards, neither; but Pomeroy's stayed just the same. That's because he's been minin'!"

"That so?"

"Placer minin'—washin' gold, and gittin' out slathers of it. I heared him tell all about it to Heald when they thought I was too far off to hear, and fast asleep into the bargain."

"Stringin' you, I guess!"

"No, boss—it's straight. Up the gulch here a piece is the place where they've took the dust out. Pomeroy's wife, she's dead, but there's a big girl—about seventeen, I reckon—and that Chinaman's here."

"The one I licked?" Black chuckled.

"That one. They been workin' steady. Close by here they've dug a place to hide the stuff."

"Where?"

"Behind some bushes. The hole goes into the side of the hill. I was watchin' Pomeroy's mouth all the while he was talkin'. You know I can tell what a man's sayin' thataway. Learned it—"

"Yes, yes, yes—I recollect; but could you find where the dust is? Is that what you want to say?"

"Let's hunt the stuff, boss. It's on the down-creek side, he said. And this is what I was goin' to say—let's not tell the rest of the bunch. Let's keep this just to ourselves. Boss, you and me, we'll go find it. Then leave me there to watch, if you want to. I'll plug the first man that happens on the cache. Mr. Black, there's a fortune for us inside of a quarter mile of this shack!"

While Black was listening, he had been thinking. Now he put a direct question:

"But, Sid, as long as you'd met the new sheriff, seems queer to me that you didn't offer to help him out, because then he wouldn't hold that train robbin' ag'in' you, and also he'd have handed you some of the dust."

"A-a-a-ah!" breathed Sidmore. "That's just the idea! *Some!* But, boss, this way you and me can divvy! I heared Heald slappin' his sides like a rooster when Pomeroy was tellin' him how much was put away. Boss, I caught the word 'tunnel' two or three times."

Black's body made the bench under him creak as he shifted his position thoughtfully. "I believe they wanted you to hear. If they can start us huntin' here and there, they'll shoot us down."

"I'm not afraid, boss. Let's look, I say. I don't want to be shot, but you can walk a lock step with me, if you want to. Say, Mr. Black, this is our *chance!*"

There was no mistaking the passionate fervor of the pleading man. Black thought again, turning this news over and over in his mind; considering Sidmore's motives; weighing the pros and cons of the matter; planning what he would do.

"Where's the mine situated?" he inquired finally.

"I told you, boss—it's up the gulch; but if you send one of the boys, well, the cat's out of the bag right there. Shorty'll begin to look, and Al. They'll hold we ain't got no more claim on the find than anybody else. Boss, don't you see that we got to keep our mouths shut?"

"In case of doubt, that's always a fairly good plan," replied Black, and grinned into the dark.

"Look here!" Sidmore continued in an earnest whisper. "Don't you realize, boss, that I could 'a' kept my tongue quiet, and not told you a word, and stayed with them, and wiped out the whole four of 'em whenever I got the chance? Sure! But you're the man I want to treat square. That's how you've treated me, boss. Say, don't you believe me *yet?* Why, boss, I've gone through an awful lot to split Pomeroy's dust with you!"

"I git you," Black returned; "but don't be so noisy. Take it easy while I go out and have a word with the boys."

He went, a pistol in either hand. Sidmore, still on the rough-hewn planks of Pomeroy's living room floor, gazed after his chief, and wiped his streaming face on the sleeves of the checkered shirt.

Outside, Black summoned his men to him with a curious bird whistle; and when they came running, and gathered about him, they found him laughing quietly. As further evidence of his unusual good nature, he proffered them cigarettes.

"It seems that Pomeroy and Heald is up quite a piece from here," he began. "Don't believe we'll have to do much worryin' about 'em. You fellers 'll remember that Pomeroy had a kid with him when he come up the meadows. Well, she's a big girl by now, and she's with her pa and the sheriff. That's throwin' a wrench into their machinery. If I ain't mistaken, they'll strike for the down-river country mighty soon."

There were answering exclamations and deep-drawn breaths of amazement, as matches exploded and the tired men leaned their backs against Rolfe Pomeroy's house.

"As I say," Black went on carelessly, "they're hampered, and we don't have to do nothin' but take things easy. Now I've had my snooze, boys, and so I think, before it gits night, and while I'm chinnin' with Sid, all you four fellers had best stretch out inside and have some sleep."

Five minutes later Black's men had taken his advice, and Sidmore, with the cattle boss close at his side, was strolling away from the house, ostensibly to give a quartet of weary men a chance to rest, but actually to lead the way, as soon as seemed discreet, to Pomeroy's hidden treasure.

Black did not go without misgivings.

"I think you're tellin' the truth, Sid," he observed; "but if you're lyin', I'll kill you as sure as you're born, even if your hands is tied!"

Sidmore laughed and chattered at one and the same time.

"If I'm lyin', you can kill me," he vowed. "Pomeroy wasn't lyin', neither—I'll back my life on that. Up where I was, on the ridge with all of them, I could see the big yellor slice that Pomeroy and Shen has took outen the side of the mountain."

"So you did see that?"

"I sure did!"

With his manacled hands hanging in front of him, Sidmore walked so that his body shielded Black's, while his eyes roved as he tried to catch sight of the hidden figures which, by now, must be close at hand.

"We'll see!" Black was pretending an indifference that he did not feel. "In a way, it would explain what Pomeroy's been up to all these years. You know, we've puzzled about that a good bit."

"Boss, if Pomeroy don't come back here and put up a fight, I could fetch in some Chinks to work the dirt, couldn't I? Or maybe, after we take what's here, Pomeroy'll go on workin'."

"I'm goin' to kill Pomeroy if I'm alive myself," swore the boss cattleman. "Now where's that cache of dust? Think you can locate it?"

"I can look into every patch of brush in a mile."

Sidmore gathered his wits for the task ahead, knowing that more eyes than Black's were upon him—the eyes of four hidden watchers. Three of the four would

close in upon the opening of the dugout where Pomeroy had hidden the gold. He counted upon Black's killing them; and once they were dead—

The thought of wealth and ease and safety made his heart pound against that checkered shirt.

At this point he faithfully carried out the sheriff's instructions, by probing all the brush that fringed the beginning of the slope, gradually approaching the right clump, which Pomeroy had carefully marked for him. When he caught sight of the mouth of the tunnel, with a large flat rock walling its mouth, he turned on Black a pair of eyes that watered with excitement.

"Here, boss! Here! They've run a hole into the mountain."

The other man did not follow at once. The quartet who were watching saw how cautiously he took a survey of both slopes, and how intently he listened. Last of all, he glanced back toward the house. Then, slowly, he crouched and made forward on his knees to join Sidmore under the brush.

By now the rock was down and the black bore of the tunnel exposed. Before it, almost gibbering with joy, was Sidmore, his shoulders stooped as he tried to peer in, along a rough timbering.

"Didn't I tell you? Oh, boss, it's true! It's—"

"Take them sticks of pitch pine outen my hind pocket," ordered Black, cutting short the other's breathless jubilation, "and light one. Then push in ahead."

He faced to let Sidmore's manacled hands take the small torches, and remained with his back to the tunnel, still more than half suspicious, and ready for trouble.

The match spluttered, the end of a stick ignited with a hiss. Not until then did Black return one of the pistols to its holster, and lower his big head to crawl after his guide.

IX

SIDMORE could travel along the rude gallery by bending his knees until his height was halved. Before him, in both hands, he held the burning pine which—with little smoke, lighted the passage a few feet in advance of him. Close on his heels, Black breathed loudly and asthmatically, and scraped the floor of the shaft with a third of his length.

"See anything?" He whispered the

question as his own bulk cut off the last vestige of light from the entrance behind him.

"A turn, boss."

They made it, and went slowly on, the tunnel growing slightly smaller, so that Sidmore, too, was compelled to crawl. Then Black was forced to take the pine torch. He cursed it fretfully. He had none of Sidmore's excitement to help him in the unpleasant exploration of that narrow, dank shaft. He snicked the catch of his automatic into place, thrust the weapon into its holster, and continued his crawling on both knees and one hand.

Now Sidmore's light was cut off; but he could not be daunted, for he knew what the tunnel held. His manacled hands were half buried in mud formed by a trickle of water, and his booted legs were plastered with the wet earth. The cattle boss raged when his hand and clothing came in contact with the yellow slime. Black's disgust made the other man grin into the dark ahead of him. There rested enough gold to buy all the boots and clothes in the State!

When Black halted to light a second strip of pitch pine, Sidmore went on.

"Boss! Boss!"

"Found something?"

Sidmore was against a wall which he knew to be made of wood. It was not more than three feet high. Even before the flame in Black's hand flared up to where his henchman was halted in a sort of cavern—for the end of the tunnel had been made larger than any part of its length—Sidmore guessed that he was beside the cache.

Black came scraping to a place along-side, and the bit of pine trembled a little in his hand.

"What's here? What's the matter with you?"

"Look!" was all Sidmore could answer.

Below the light, and in front of Black's face, he opened both of his handcuffed hands. They were full of gold.

"Bushels of it, boss. *Bushels* of it! I told you! I told you!"

Black only breathed and muttered as he pushed against the side of the bin and raised the pine taper. The bin had a cover, which Sidmore had shoved partly to one side. Black lifted the heavy frame of rough-hewn boards until its outer edge was higher than his own head. As he thrust the light forward, he and Sidmore looked

down upon a large trough that fairly brimmed with yellow metal.

Sidmore went on babbling like a man gone suddenly mad. As he talked, he laughed, and plowed the rude chest of dust with both hands, burying them to the steel that bound them together. Then, as he rocked on his knees in a perfect abandon of joy and triumph, the tears began to pour down out of his pale eyes and shine upon the stubble of his new beard.

With the pine flame burning his face, Black kept a silence that was ominous. At first his eyes had been focused upon the shining surface of the bin's contents. Now they watched only the torch in his hand. Rapidly it was being consumed in the direction of his big, calloused fingers. Bare-headed—for he had left his wide hat just inside the mouth of Pomeroy's tunnel—he waited for the light to go out.

"Aw, say! Ain't it cool? Ain't it heavy? Who ever seen such a lot of it in one spot, boss? Aw, boss, ain't you glad we kept this to ourselves?"

The flame was close to Black's fingers. He bared his few dark teeth in an awful smile.

"Ye-ah—it's great, Sid!"

"I'm glad I found it for you, boss. We'll clean up this time! After that I'm goin' to go straight—I am, sure as I breathe! Aw, boss, you and me is rich—*rich!* Oh, Christopher Columbus!"

"It's a fortune!" Black's whisper was almost soft. "The rest of the outfit don't know about it. As you say, Sid, it's just you and me, old son!"

The flame was against his skin. He let the unburned end fall to the wet earth at the edge of the bin timbers, and then placed his knee on it.

"Got any more pitch sticks?" whispered Sidmore.

Black was fumbling in his clothes.

"I think so. Also, I got plenty of matches. Here—see if you can light one." A match box was thrust against Sidmore's arm, and he took it in his hand. "No, I'll hold the box, so you make the light."

This was how it was done. The match flared, showing Sidmore's face and Black's left hand.

"That Chink's like a bag o' bones, he's worked so hard helpin' to get out this dust!" scoffed Sidmore, while he held the lighted match.

Black's right hand—the hand that lacked

a finger—was behind him. With the other hand he reached for a third sliver of pine; and, as it caught fire, forward came something upon which the flame glinted. There was a blast of smoke and flame that roared about the heads of the two as they knelt. Then Sidmore tipped gently sidewise, and lay against the timbers of the bin.

Torch in one hand, pistol in the other, Black looked at his victim, his face working in a savage grin as he observed the tears of happiness that still glistened among the short hairs of Sidmore's unshaven countenance.

"So the Chink worked himself to skin and bones, did he?" he inquired quizzically. "Poor feller!"

Out from under Sidmore's red hair flowed something still redder—a thin trickle of it, from the long wound made by the glancing bullet. The fresh red drew a dark line down to the quivering muscles of the jaw. Black watched the result of his aim half indifferently, while he covered his mouth and coughed in protest against the powder smoke in the air.

A moment, and Sidmore's head moved. With a wriggle of his body, and using a shoulder to help him, he lifted his face and fastened his look upon Black. Then he began to whisper:

"Always was afraid, afraid, afraid—of 'most everything, seems like. It's like I told the sheriff, boss—I'm a coward. Born thataway, I reckon. Never could stand solid, as you might say, with nobody. Well, I've made my last mistake, boss, ain't I? Yep—and I've paid for it."

Black leaned forward a little, striving to see what damage his shot had done. If an animal had been lying before him, shot to death, instead of a man, he could not have shown less feeling. He was merely curious, and interested on the score of his own plans.

Sidmore smiled at the face held near his own.

"Who did you fetch in with us?" he faintly inquired.

"What's that?"

"I say, who—who's that? Why, boss, it's a lady—darned if it ain't! Excuse me, ma'am! Sure, boss—right behind you, there—a lady, and she's—" Surprise silenced him for a moment. The pale eyes opened wide, and shone. "Why, *ma!*" he whispered. "Say, ma, how does it come that *you're* in here with us? And—

and—right alongside of you there—who are all them other folks?"

He began to whisper inaudibly after that, staring past Black into the dark over the farther end of the gold bin. Black smiled in complete satisfaction.

"When I git rid of Pomeroy's crowd," he observed to the dying man, "I'll be the only one knows about this. Much obliged for you fetchin' me!"

Painstakingly he lowered the cover of the bin, in order to keep any falling dirt out of the precious find. Then, turning half about, the taper in one hand, a pistol in the other, he started back along the tunnel, slowly, cautiously, stopping now and then to listen.

It was just as he reached the angle in the shaft that he heard something. It was a dull sound from out where the sun was shining. Following the sound, a puff of warmish air struck against his lowered face, and the flame of the pine splinter was blown his way and set to dancing.

Startled, he thrust his torch into the ground at his side, putting out the fire. Then he sat back upon his heels and waited, holding his breath, while his heart took on a louder beating, and he shivered.

Next he heard a voice. He broke into a sickening perspiration. He had listened to that same voice once before, as he sat out on the porch of his ranch house, only a few days back, taking the air of the mountain morning. He knew it to be the voice of the young man who had called himself Lockhart.

"Cain, Cain"—the words of the speaker were almost gentle—"what have you done? The blood of your brother cries from the ground!"

Black roused himself.

"Now look-a-here, Heald!" he called back boldly. "Don't you go tryin' none of your smart stuff with me!"

There was no answer to his peremptory warning. At the end of another half minute, as he sat back from the turn in the shaft, to be sure that he would not be struck by a rifle ball, he noticed that there was a slight thickening of the dark about him, and that the air in the passage had changed.

Frightened, he dropped forward noiselessly; but he scarcely needed to peer around the corner, for he already had guessed what had happened. However, so inky was the blackness about him that he

did not know that he had reached the turn until his shock of hair made a welcome cushion between the top of his big head and the timbered wall of the tunnel.

Astonished, again he sat back. Then, once more half turning by feeling about him, he tried to pierce the darkness of the part of the shaft that led out.

"Somethin's betwixt me and the brush," he admitted.

All his breath went from him. He swayed on his knees, gulping and choking. He knew that he was staring in the right direction, and the fact that he could catch not the faintest glimmer of light at the end of the shaft was all the proof he wanted of his plight.

He was a prisoner.

X

A RIFLE cracked in the still air, and echoed far and farther against one after another of the steep wooded slopes. As the smoke drifted away from the muzzle of the gun, there was a loud scuffling of feet, as three of Black's sleeping men sprang up from their blankets in Pomeroy's windowless living room amid the banging of overturning benches.

After that, for some minutes, there was quiet in the remote cañon—a quiet broken only by the crisp flittings of startled birds, and by the persistent gurgle of the stream that was the headwaters of the deep, narrow river boiling below Steve Black's grade.

In that silence the four men who had been sleeping in the log house—Jeff, Shorty, Al, and another—held their breath, as their leader had done not five minutes before, and listened, standing stock-still in the dark, where Pomeroy and his daughter had likewise often listened.

But the enemy did not approach. Almost straight in front of the heavy, rough-hewn door, the three who were watching held station in the thick underbrush that screened the cabin from the sight of any one traveling upriver. Well covered against a counterattack, they exchanged smiling glances.

Heald's smile was merely good-humored—that of a man who is amused, and does not question the outcome. Shen seemed childishly pleased, wrinkling his old visage until he looked like an ancient monkey. In Pomeroy's face there was something terrible, as he screwed up his features in a si-

lent laugh; and his eyes shone brilliantly, feverishly, while he breathed like a runner.

Presently the sheriff spoke.

"Well, that's giving them something to gossip about in there! Just now, Mr. Pomeroy, I wouldn't mind being a sparrow under your eaves. The cat's out of the bag. They know that while they've been snoozing, the boss has gone and got himself into trouble. Let's see which way the cat will jump!"

Pomeroy still drew his breath hard, and he talked huskily, and with an excited catch in his voice:

"Queer that Black would take the chances he did! To send 'em in there like that, to sleep, then go wandering off with Sidmore, and with nobody left on guard!"

"Not so queer," argued Heald. "You forget that Sidmore was to tell him how many, many miles away you and I and Shen were, and that we were burdened with a young girl. Why, Black couldn't believe we'd come back here and meet him and his gang face to face, with Miss Pomeroy on our hands! No, it's what I expected the big bully to do."

The sheriff paused, and shook his head.

"But never in my wildest dreams," he continued, "did I expect that what has happened to Black himself could possibly happen. We figured he'd plan to divide the dust with his gang, didn't we? Bad as I think he is, it never occurred to me that he'd want every ounce of your washings for himself! That's why he killed Sidmore—that explains the shot in the tunnel. Those two quarreled, probably. Jerusha, but that Black is a beast!"

Pomeroy sucked in his breath.

"My dust!" he said, his voice tremulous. "Sheriff, that yellow stuff's going to buy my youngster all the wonderful things that a girl ought to have!"

"Give me two weeks," Heald answered, "and good luck, and I'll guarantee that you and Miss Noreen will be sitting down at a beefsteak dinner in the best hotel in Great Valley!"

"She's a fine girl! She's the grandest girl! Not a lazy bone in her body! Never a whimper out of her!" said Pomeroy.

His eyes blurred with tears, and he swept a hand across them.

"You've got a right to be proud of her," agreed the sheriff. "I've never seen a man of her age take his place with a rifle in a more businesslike way than Miss Noreen

did just now when we left her to watch at the tunnel."

"Of course she knows Black can't get out," countered Noreen's father; "but she doesn't know when more of the ridge outfit will show up along the creek. Sheriff, she's watched for 'em ever since her mother died—yes, even before she could fire a gun she's watched. I used to tell her that if she saw anybody, she was to yell bloody murder, and then duck into the shaft. She's brave, all right! She's like her mother, sheriff—and her mother died in yonder, where that nest of rattlesnakes is hiding!"

"It's an anxious little nest, though," declared Heald. "I've let them alone this long because I want to worry them a bit. I wish we could sit tight and let them cool their heels for a couple of days, or more—make them beg for water and grub."

"Yes—they'll never find the well under the house," returned Pomeroy, "or the supplies, or the dugout we fixed up in case Black might ride in and burn us down."

"We can't risk waiting—it's taking chances. As you say, more of Black's men may drop by at any minute. We've got to play this game safe, and get these four into our hands just as fast as it can be managed. I fairly ache to see them stew a little, but there's too much at stake."

"And I'd rather see 'em in a line—hog-tied." Pomeroy bared his teeth.

"Same here! When we've got 'em all trussed up, and Black is alongside them, we'll do all the resting and recuperating that we feel like—all the gloating, too—while my posse comes up."

As the rifles of the sheriff and Shen were, at the moment, steadily aimed at the door, Pomeroy permitted himself an astonished stare in the sheriff's direction.

"Your posse!" he exclaimed.

If Shen, in his covert close by, heard what Heald had said, he did not even turn his untidy head in the direction of the two white men. Quiet, smiling, with oriental placidity, he looked steadily along the barrel of the old musket.

"Yes—my posse," repeated Heald.

Pomeroy's tanned and bearded face fairly knotted in a spasm of emotion.

"Why! Why!" he exclaimed chokingly. "Sheriff, you mean to say we're going to have help?"

"I haven't told you my program before now," answered Heald, "because, having

Sidmore with us, I was afraid that Miss Noreen or you might let a word drop unintentionally, or—what would be worse—you'd act too happy and confident, and Sidmore would smell a mouse and sell us out to Black. Now that we've got our grizzly in a cage, and—"

The older man was murmuring, and trembling so violently that he shook the clump of shrubbery that hid him.

"My deputy will give me two weeks," went on the sheriff. "Then he'll start his men on foot up the grade from Great Valley. He won't set out until the dark of the moon. Of course, the Black camp will know he's on his way—there's a spy in Great Valley, or maybe a dozen of them. The posse will travel only at night, keeping far apart, and wearing the kind of jacket I brought along. In the daytime the men 'll lie low, but they'll be pretty sure to round up anybody who tries to go down that road."

"If that road ever clears! If it does!"

"Don't you be afraid, Mr. Pomeroy. This situation hasn't been straightened out before this simply because there's been too much of Black's money circulating around the county seat."

"Don't I know?"

"Meanwhile, things at the camp will be working in our favor. As Black's men are all criminals, with the boss away, when they hear my lads are stringing into the mountains, their nerve will peter out, and they'll get jumpy."

"They'll scatter!" said Pomeroy, energetically bobbing his ragged hat.

"Or they'll come this way, hunting the boss, and will ride up along your little river."

Suddenly, up from the collar of Pomeroy's remnant of shirt, and from the fold of his bit of shoulder blanket, there rushed a surge of wrathful scarlet.

"They will, if they want to die!" he said fiercely.

"But will they want to risk their lives and their freedom for Mr. Black? I doubt it. If they do, though, we must have everything in hand before they come."

"Let's get busy, sheriff!"

"We start now. Remember—I want to go weaving down into Great Valley with a full hand, Mr. Pomeroy! I want Black and every one of these lads snubbed up first, and made sure with a squaw hitch."

"I won't shoot unless you order."

"I'll call this quartet out one at a time. If they don't obey, or if they come in a bunch, shoot!"

"Ha-a-a-a!" breathed Pomeroy, like a man who has just tasted a draft of something pleasant.

"Understand me, Shen?" inquired the sheriff.

The oval mask of old yellow silk puckered itself around the keen black eyes, splitting away from the teeth which resembled Black's.

"All lite," was the simple answer.

XI

THE low conversation of those outside the house had, as Heald intended, carried to those standing within, though only as an indistinct murmur of voices. No word of what was said had been understood; but the four men from the cattle camp knew that they were penned in.

Two of them had been feeling along the log walls, searching for the openings they suspected were there, but not daring to light a match. The other two had been trying to see out through a tiny slit under the single door. The first pair had failed to discover the cunningly devised apertures contrived for use as rifle ports before the voice of the sheriff brought short their hunt, and halted a four-fed stream of profane and excited talk.

"You there!" called Heald. "You in the cabin!" And, after a moment's wait, having received no answer: "You four from Black's! Open that door an inch or so! I want to tell you something."

A muffled retort, a sudden scraping of feet, then a loud rap on the inner side of the door. Next, following a short interval, the door was swung back a foot.

"Who's there?" was called out in a sulky tone.

"The sheriff."

"Where's the boss?"

"We've got him shut up in a tunnel—the tunnel that Sidmore took him into."

At that there was a burst of profanity and protest, Sidmore's name sounding above the chorus.

"Sid's a yeller polecat!" shouted an angry voice.

"Sid's either wounded or dead," Heald answered. "Now, if you men want to come out of this racket with whole skins, you'll do exactly what I tell you."

"Don't kid yourself!" came the retort.

"One man will come out now," continued the sheriff, "with both hands in the air. If I don't see your first man in half a minute, I'll burn the shack over your heads!"

There was laughter then, and the door was kicked shut.

"They're going to try to stall us," declared Pomeroy.

"They won't stall me," vowed Heald. His watch was before him. He was noting the second hand. "If we're soft with 'em, they'll think we're afraid, or weak."

The sheriff had already signed to Shen, and the Chinese was crawling away, to appear at the downstream end of the house a moment later. Behind his spare, blue-clad figure, as an ant might drag a twig twenty times its own weight, he was drawing after him, by their stumps, four or five great tops of dry brush.

His body bent almost double, he pushed Pomeroy's supply of fireplace fuel against the corner of the cabin. As he lighted and applied a match, some dried leaves caught; and while he was darting back into the shrubbery, with a running crackle, some first small branches blazed. Then there was a rushing roar, and the big sun-cured, tindery heap was leaping against, and eating into, the notched ends of the logs.

Where they stood, grouped in the dark room, the four prisoners heard the fire and raised a shout of alarm. Then, amid a scuffling and a babbling, the door sprang ajar a second time, and the toe of a man's boot showed at the sill.

"Come ahead!" the sheriff sang out cheerfully. "Everything's over, boys, but the shouting!"

They could not hear him for the noise of the conflagration; but a whitish handkerchief was thrust into sight on the end of a half blackened stick, at the very top of the door.

"One at a time!" crooned Heald. "Don't fetch a weapon of any kind."

Now the sweater-clad shoulders of the man named Jeff came wedging their way out. His empty left hand was waving above a bare, bald head. His right hand held the flag of truce, while fearfully blinking eyes traveled from side to side. The first captive halted on the flat stone before the house.

"Don't be afraid," continued Heald. "No one will be shot down in cold blood. Step this way!"

Jeff almost ran toward the sheriff, trying all the while to spy out those in the thicket.

"Which way?" he demanded. "What do I do next?"

"How are you?" Heald greeted him.

The other dropped to the ground, holding out his hands to be tied.

"Aw, just soso, right now," he replied disconsolately.

As the house swiftly became a gigantic pyre, the remaining members of the quartet, one at a time, were received with something like formality, searched for weapons, bound—their wrists together, and their arms tight against their sides—and ranged in a line.

Like the first one to surrender, the other three took their treatment with a quiet readiness and an even temper which hinted of relief. Of the three, Bill was a personage with red-lidded eyes set too far apart, large ears standing out from a shaven head which showed the ridges of an unpracticed barber, and a nose turned up in a stumpy crescent. Shorty was the clown of the Black outfit, squat, oversupplied with an upholstery of fat, round-faced, cross-eyed, and with hair the whitish yellow of a baby's. Al, a dark youth with the nervous fidgetiness of a colt, fell to blubbering as he met the sunlight.

Black's hirelings watched Pomeroy as he paced before them and fed his happy eyes upon their helplessness. At Shen they did not look; nor did the Chinese lift his eyes to them, but kept his crumpled visage lowered before the same men who, a few years past, had stood about, noisily guffawing, while Black's heavy whip made flaming welts across the coolie's naked back.

With the cartridges in the burning house exploding gayly, Heald thought it wise to withdraw as soon as possible. The seven men hastened to the vine-draped stronghold, low but commodious, where Pomeroy's daughter sat on watch.

Crestfallen as Black's men were, they did not need to be told how they should conduct themselves in the presence of the girl. Although two of them had shot down unsuspecting settlers on the disputed range, now, with the remarkable decency and consideration that the Western bad man can show, all four left off their cursing, and threw the chatelaine of the little tower sidelong, shamefaced glances that offered admiring testimony to her pluck.

They were ordered to stretch out upon the dirt-floored place, each with his legs bound at the ankle and the knee. While they lay with the roaring of Shen's bonfire in their ears, their jubilant captors set about removing from the tunnel mouth Heald's effective barricade of bowlders.

Dropped on a knee to one side of the shaft, Heald shouted into it the tale of what he and his helpers had just accomplished. As this brought no answer from the trapped leader, the sheriff resorted again to threats:

"Black, you'll throw out your guns, and then follow them, or I'll smoke you out! After I've smoked you, if you stick where you are, I'll block the entrance of that tunnel, and it won't be unblocked for six months!"

Black raged like a tiger then. His wild bellowings were sweet music to Pomeroy, but Heald did not trouble to listen to them. Out of the stone watchtower he had carried a quantity of dried grass, which had been gathered to be used for bedding purposes. Thrusting an armful of the hay before the opening of the passage, he threw a lighted match into it.

"He-e-e-cald!" cried Black imploringly.

"The game's up," asserted Heald. "Your hired men are as helpless as so many sheep. Don't be a fool. Come out!"

"Here's my pistols!"

Two came spinning out, one after the other, and were allowed to lay beyond the patch of burned grass.

"Got any more?"

"No."

"No tricks, Black! The people who elected me expect you down Great Valley way, dead or alive; so if you show up out here with a third weapon, whether you're able to use it against us or not, I'm going to give Pomeroy permission to shoot you!"

The story of the deliberate burning of the cabin, coupled with the confirming sound of the flames, made Black cautious; and there hurtled forth a third weapon.

"Now," continued the sheriff, "I want Sidmore."

"Let him fetch himself out!" was the answer.

"If you ever want to eat and drink again," said Heald firmly, "you'll go back and do as I tell you!"

"Don't you dast treat me like a dog!" raged Black. "Maybe you're the sheriff, but this is a civilized country!"

"I'm glad you think that," returned Heald; "but this part of the country hasn't been civilized since you set your camp on the ridge, and shot men in the back, and whipped inoffensive Chinamen. It's only got suddenly civilized since you got shut up where you were trying to steal Pomeroy's washings!"

"You give me a chance!" came back the hollow complaint.

"Sure! If you don't carry out my orders in fifteen seconds, I'll give you the same chance that you've given the settlers of the Five Meadows!"

A surly grumble:

"All right—I'll fetch him."

For another moment, however, Black rocked himself in the dim light where he knelt, and struggled against the temptation to cut the veins of his wrists. The man who had defied him was alive and well, and had heaped up a rich store of gold, while his own little empire had crumbled under his feet, and would be taken from him. If he left this dark tunnel, in which he was brought to bay like some animal, he would have to bring out with him the body of his last victim.

"They'll sneer at me!" he said to himself. "They'll throw their hats in the air all the way to the county seat, because I'm took! How Pomeroy'll gloat!"

But he turned heavily about and dragged himself back along the tunnel. Shen, taking no chances, found a long stick, poked the cattle boss's pistols out of line with the opening, then secured them.

It was a full quarter of an hour before Black again approached the guarded exit. By then a new plan had come into his mind. Puffing and blowing with his labor, he backed into sight feet first, covering the ground on his knees. After him, by the two shackled hands, he dragged Sidmore.

Though Noreen Pomeroy did not allow herself to shrink from viewing the scene, even for the two white men who were watching it was a dire one. The dead man's already stiffening body was plastered from broad shoulders to boot heels with the yellowish mud of the inner tunnel, so that there was no pattern left on the under side of the checkered shirt. Matted with mire, too, was the dank red hair.

"Hands up!"

Black was dazzled by the sun. As he straightened, he had to keep his eyes shut, for they pained him. Slowly he faced

about. Not only was his clothing streaked and pasted, but his face was smutted by the smoke of the pitch torches, and he looked like some horrible, slimy ogre.

"Well? Well?" He was sparring for time while getting accustomed to the light, a little of which was coming under his lowered lids. "What you want me to do?"

Heald threw a pair of handcuffs so that they fell at Black's feet.

"Stoop," he commanded. "Lower just one hand, pick up those wristlets, and slip 'em on."

Black started to carry out the order. He could not see his men, where they were stretched out, but he could see the three who were aiming at him, the black bores of their guns so near. At the stock of one rifle was the face of Pomeroy, crinkled with laughter.

Chokingly, Black began to mourn:

"I lost! I lost! I'm done for! I'm goin' to be robbed! Robbed! Boys, I done my best!"

The quartet on the ground behind Pomeroy's daughter did not reply. Only Heald broke in, poking his rifle in Black's direction to enforce his order:

"Hurry up! Get 'em on!"

Black stooped, picked up the handcuffs, and straightened—whereupon Pomeroy could no longer keep silence, but fell to chortling in his beard. The next instant, with his countenance fearfully distorted, and with the wild bellow of a madman, Black sprang upon his enemy, clutched him by the throat, and pulled him down to the ground, shielding his own body with Pomeroy's, while his fingers sank deep.

He did not waste his breath a second time. As for the older man, his breathing was entirely cut off. The two whopped the earth with their bodies, like a pair of fish impaled on the same spear.

Dropping his rifle, Heald caught up a length of rope and made a loop in it. As the cattle boss suddenly came uppermost in the mortal struggle, the sheriff dropped a loop over his shaggy head. Then he backed away, drawing the loop tight, and pinning Black's arms at both elbows.

Shen, after a sidewise glance at the sobbing girl in the door of the little fort, quietly advanced a couple of steps in Black's direction. He almost sauntered, his head lowered, his musket held at a careless angle; but even as Heald wrenched the cattle boss free of his gasping, strangling vic-

tim, the Chinese uttered a smothered exclamation in his own tongue, thrust the muzzle of the musket against Black's torn, mud-spattered vest, and fired.

A fortnight later the sheriff followed his men and his captives through the narrow pass to the first great level of the stolen range. The yellow-breasted larks were singing where the grass was deep, and in the meadow the cattle and horses that had been Steve Black's were feeding by hundreds. They scarcely lifted their heads to

observe the strange cavalcade that was going by.

Only Noreen Pomeroy was on horseback—a slender, quiet, shy rider who watched about her gravely. The men, bearded like so many brigands, walked at the heads of their horses; but none of the saddles was empty. Those which had carried Black and his followers, as well as those which belonged to the posse, were loaded with sacks made of cowhide, each sack holding a share of the golden treasure of the rescued and jubilant Pomeroy.

THE END

BALLADE OF THE DRIFTING YEARS

WHEN the year began, when the spring was here
 With its green young hope and its purpose high,
 Oh, the things we planned—ah, didn't we, dear?—
 That we'd do together, you and I!
 So many a year had fled by
 With foundered schemes and with tasks undone;
 But this year, we said—and once more we sigh;
 This year, like the rest, has drifted on.

Oh, golden and gay industrious year,
 The harvest wagons go rumbling by;
 Men have sowed and reaped, and they make good cheer
 In my neighbor's barn stacked up to the sky;
 But I watch the autumn sunset die
 On my autumn fields, as I muse upon
 The perished hours with a dreary eye—
 This year, like the rest, has drifted on.

Heigho, beloved, too early near
 The winter looms and the snow is nigh,
 And a colder thought chills the heart with fear
 Of the thinning years that are left to fly;
 "Too late, too late!" I shall hear them cry,
 As I take my place with the dead and gone.
 Oh, is it too late for another try?
 This year, like the rest, has drifted on.

ENVOI

Princess, this ballade, I'll not deny,
 Is a gloomy stave for your eyes to con;
 But next year— You laugh, and good reason why;
 This year, like the rest, has drifted on.

Richard Le Gallienne

was
ack
hed
like
of
was
ack
ich
with
ing
res-